

Friday night Dharma, week 4

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So in this talk, I want to kind of bring this to a kind of a conclusion, maybe by summarizing or concentrating around some of the key things that I'd like to pass on from this retreat. And I'd like to start by saying that words matter, that words convey a lot, and in some words... to have unfortunate consequences, and some have beneficial. And the words we use for describing the practice, discussing the practice, make a difference. And many, often enough, I think, this distinction between the two operating systems, if we accept it, that there is this organic system that's kind of a source of wholesomeness within, and there's the synthetic process factory system where things are manufactured and what gets manufactured is not really part of the natural world. It's part of the human-made world of our imagination and constructs. That some people live in the factory, live in this constructed world that most of the time, so people didn't even know about the organic world and how to let that move through them.

And so there's language in the constructed operating system that's used sometimes to try to describe the practice that is from the organic system. And so sometimes it doesn't quite work. Some of the words, they might even reinforce some of the ideas of straining, even aggression, assertiveness in the Dharma. Selfishness, attainments, becoming the most successful enlightened person on the block. And that you have to somehow engineer yourself into some kind of a deep state. You have to kind of go, you know, hold certain things at bay, reject parts of yourself, you have to somehow emphasize something that's superhuman or special, or just all good, like loving-kindness, in a way that kind of begins dividing us rather than making us whole.

And that's my understanding of this constructed system, especially when we construct kind of identities with it, that it often divides us even more. The nature of the organic system is that it belongs to a whole, a whole ecosystem, but a whole plant that's growing. And the

plant doesn't divide itself up into the leaves and the stem and the roots and the flowers. The plant is just a whole. And so some of the language we use for practice, we have to be very careful for it. And not use the language from the constructed system to try to understand this practice because it might just lead to more constructions.

And one of those is to be in a hurry, to think that it's just a matter of, you know, making the right, doing the right things. And boom, there's all kinds of important things to do in life. So it's important to get enlightened quickly because then you can get on with the stock market and recreational opportunities and... you know, drugs, rock and roll, and such things. Because, I mean, you know, there's a lot to do. So it's very inefficient, this Dharma practice, because, you know, so it's best to do it quickly.

Like in that area, there's a famous video that was filmed at Spirit Rock, I forget what it was called, but... Sickest Buddhist. Hmm? Sickest Buddhist. Sickest, sickest Buddhist. So I guess you can see it on YouTube, hmm? The sickest Buddhist. And there's a guy who just really, really conceded and practices at Spirit Rock. And he talks about going to his meditation session. He's, oh yeah, I nailed it in 10 minutes. Yeah, I mean, it would be really good, right? I mean, why a whole month? I mean, just imagine what you could have been doing. You know, you could have become wealthy and, you know, all kinds of wonderful things you could have done. And, you know, so 10 minutes, you know, please, there could only be a pill, the enlightenment pill. Then it would be just everything would be good. It had to be very sad. Yeah.

And there are people who are engineering their ways to enlightenment, to trying that, to all these people who are inventing. It's been doing it for a long time now, but inventing mind reading, reading your wavelengths in your mind and put on these little crowns and they kind of feed you your mind and music and sound and waves and get you concentrated quickly. And then there's a lot of, there's plenty of people trying to figure out the quick way, the hack for enlightenment. And I think it's really sad, because it's not just about becoming somehow some great experience. It's about growing. It's about understanding oneself in a deep way. It's about composting yourself, working through your challenges and your hangups, and not just kind of getting a quick fix. So I think it's better if it's slow. And maybe becomes more realistic, it allows something to grow, just deep and profound.

So, just knowing about this idea of two operating systems, knowing about the *yoni-so man-asikāra*, knowing that, at least for me, discovering in the suttas that this whole *saṅkhāra* operating system, oh, it's presented repeatedly as a unfortunate alternative to this deeper operating system that we want to tap into and allow grow. And then there's, as I've studied the Buddha's teachings, I see that the English translations sometimes don't really provide

the richness of the human potential that we are. And sometimes it kind of leads us, leads it kind of flat. And there's a way in which the way that I was taught there about Buddhism was kind of flat, kind of not very emotionally or humanly deep. The way I was taught was often, sometimes even in a kind of militaristic way, about striving and pushing and destroying and destroying the defilements, which in my mind maybe belongs to this constructed system. And a kind of dismissal of so much of our humanity, sometimes in Theravāda and Buddhism, because it's considered somehow part of *saṃsāra* or considered somehow impure or something.

But when I read the teachings of the Buddha in the original, I come across something much richer and more human and emotionally inspiring and meaningful than I get from the English translations. And I mean, one word that is, I think I talked about it, but the word *kalyāṇa*, which often in the translations gets translated as good, good. And you can't argue with good. Good is good. You have to grant that good is good. No arguments about that. Let's keep it good. But you get a very... So when it says the Dharma is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, that's good. But if you translate it as beautiful, you get a whole different emotional resonance, and not just emotional resonance, but some kind of resonance that speaks to something profound within us that is awoken, that's touched, that's something that's part of maybe this organic system that can begin humming and supporting us.

The Dharma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, beautiful in the end. And then when the Buddha talked about becoming skilled in the beauty of *samādhi*, what does *samādhi* have to do with beauty? I mean, it's just like one-pointedness. You're going to get it one-pointed and hold on tight and just got to, zzzop, you know, laser your way right through, you know. That's what it's about, you know. And I've known people like myself who've gotten headaches from trying to concentrate. There are people who go a little bit crazy from trying to concentrate the wrong way. But it's a little bit hard maybe to get sick with the effort if you're thinking what you're doing is you're becoming skilled in the beautiful. Wow, what does that mean? How does that work? And I think of these *jhānic* states as quite beautiful.

The instructions for *jhānas*, one of the classic, kind of the only real instruction that the Buddha seems to give around *jhānas*, or the primary ones, is to spread the goodness of the *jhāna* throughout your body. Fill yourself with this goodness. That makes it beautiful. To ride the concentration really heavy, to get the intense energy going higher and higher, might not be the best way to experience the beauty of an inner life. So if beauty is part of the picture, how do we relate to that? And how does that change the whole approach?

And so this idea that *bhāvanā* means to grow more than it means the English word practice, to me that's very meaningful. Right. Because of what I've said now a number of times, I think, that practice suggests a technique. And some people have this, you know, this, the constructing minds approach to techniques. That if it's just a matter of doing this technique, then everything will go right. And I know people who tie themselves in knots trying to somehow synthetically technique themselves into some states of being. But if the orientation is to grow, if we call *bhāvanā* growing, cultivating, we get a very different, again, resonance inside, a very different association, I think for some of us at least, that now we're talking about trusting something that's within, as opposed to thinking it's all about your own mental effort. It's all up to you.

And so to begin trusting that there's something that's different than selfish effort, self-made effort, something different has to happen here. Something different has to be made room and allowed for. To trust something really deep in here, to trust the *yonī* or the heart. And so that you have growing. And how do we harmonize ourselves with growing? How do we support? How do we go along with that?

So in the two classic metaphors for engaging and moving along in this Dharma practice, he is not building a house. It's walking... and being carried by a current in a river. It's almost as if in the beginning of practice we have to offer something ourselves, something very human, something very ordinary, something in ancient India. And I think people, almost everyone did, all day long. They walked. There were no buses, trains, motorcycles, electric scooters. Most people didn't have horses and oxen to carts. They walked. They walked long distances, they walked short distances, they walked. So a very ordinary thing. And walking the path, I walk, the literal meaning of the refuges, I think Paul, you know, the translation is, I walk for refuge, I walk to refuge. In the Buddha, with the Buddha, I walk. So that's very different than saying, I take refuge. I mean, it's innocent enough to say I take refuge, but it is a taking word. It is an acquisitional word. And so what is the subtle ways in which I take refuge in the Buddha? I go for refuge. I walk for refuge. It's a very different feeling.

And... So this ordinary thing of walking, bringing our spring, and also what I like about walking is we bring all of ourselves when we walk. We can't leave something behind. You know, like, I don't know, today I'm not going to bring my hands, they're tired. And that doesn't usually work. And so you bring all of yourself, to bring all of yourself to the Dharma. What does it mean to bring all? What does it mean to be whole? What does it mean to make an effort that includes all of you, no part left out? You're not divided, which some people are if the practice is too intellectual, if the practice is mostly about thinking your way out of the difficulties or

your life.

But the second one, when practice becomes mature enough, it becomes no longer walking, it no longer becomes something we have to participate in, that we have to give ourselves to. And the word urgency came up this afternoon. So urgency is something that we offer to the practice. That's the personal part that we have to offer. But then there's also at some point the trust, to a deep trust, there's something different operating here that we can be carried by, supported by, And this word stream entry, the word *sota* for stream literally means current. And so what's not getting into the stream, it's being carried by the stream, carried down river, carried. And the path now is no longer a path to walk, but it's a current to be supported by, to be guided by, to be carried by. And I think that's a beautiful metaphor for something.

And so it makes a difference, the metaphors, and to have a sense of these metaphors, like, oh, to be carried on something. What is that? What is your trust? When do you lay back on your back and just kind of metaphorically allow something profound to carry you? The dharma. The etymology for the word dharma in Sanskrit is support. That which supports. So when do you allow the dharma to support you?

And so then we come to these other words. And here's an example, I think, where these two operating systems get confused or can get confused, depending on how things are translated. Then in a few places in the suttas, they talk about having a deep insight into impermanence and constancy, the arising and passing of stuff. To really set something free inside of us, to really release something deep. Something gets released. And some of the English translations will describe that as a breakthrough. Some of them, here's the word, penetration when it's penetrated. And breakthrough and penetration have all kinds of potentially very challenging associations in English. And what it means and what it suggests and what it suggests about the person who does the breakthrough or does the penetration, I kind of think it belongs maybe to a very different approach than the Dharma approach.

And it turns out that the word for that they're translating is this word that they started off talking today, is the question that Rodney had about *abhisamaya*. And *samaya* is this powerful word, Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna Sūtras and in the other Indian religions. But it comes from the word to meet together, to come together. And it can mean, among other things, to be in agreement. People have a *samaya* means they come to agree together on something. And so I'd like to translate this as... not as breakthrough or penetration, but at deep meeting, we meet in constancy, we meet change in some deep way. I like to use because of the word agreement to understand it as harmony. We're coming into harmony with some aspect of reality. We're coming into harmony with the way things are. We're coming into a certain kind

of alignment that... that is better. Rather than we're coming into it, we're just kind of, you know, breaking down the gates to heaven.

And so this idea of translating as harmony is my translation, but it's not so far-fetched because in the classic discussions about inside meditation, there comes a time when this kind of liberating, releasing experience happens, that the insight texts call it, in English, they use the word conformity. And conformity is maybe a little odd word because most of us don't want to be so conformist. But the word is, they're translating as *anuloma*. *Loma* means hair, and *anu* means with. And with the hair has the same meaning in Pāli as with the grain in English. And you really get the sense of it when you're petting a cat. You want to pet the cat with the hair, not against the hair, if you want the right effect. So this idea of going with the hair, so... So the English translators do conformity, but I kind of like to call it an harmony in, I don't know if there's other words besides harmony, harmony in alignment, in attunement.

And then what this refers to is that as the inside practice gets deeper, there comes a time when we're in a deep attunement, a deep... harmony with the way things are. And this is a turning point in a person's life, and the Vipassanā, is to have that harmony. So if you know that that's where you're going, would you approach that going? Would you walk there? Would you hold attitude towards it be different than if you were told you're going to break through, you're going to penetrate this problem and get to the other side. I suspect the whole approach that people take is very different depending on the words that are being used here. And so this idea of flowing, this idea of beauty, this idea of being in harmony.

And when we talked about *samādhi*, I read all that lists from the Abhidhamma that they associated *samādhi* with harmony or the *samādhi* of not being in disharmony. It's a kind of, so what if *samādhi* is understood to be something? There's a different word, it's not *anuloma*, it's *sammā*. But still, you get a very different attitude, approach, feeling for what you're doing. And so when the Buddha became the Buddha, he didn't call himself the Buddha. In fact, he's very rarely called the Buddha in the ancient texts. It's mostly when he's speaking English. And that he became Buddha. It's been accustomed to just keep always refer to him not with that name. But when he referred to himself, he used the word Tathāgata. And it might be an important religious word in India from before his time. But one way of translating this word to talk, the most common way that people want to translate it is very etymologically literal, which is the one who is thus gone or the one who is thus come. And that's kind of nice. But it's the second part of the word, a compound word, can also mean not gone or come, but it can mean the one. It's just kind of a suffix. And it's the one who is thus. It's a very different feeling. The one who is thus. as opposed to the one who is thus gone. He's gone. He's

gone, so that's too bad. Or the dust come. That's kind of good. But the one who is thus. And I think that's probably what the original meaning is, because there's sometimes... There's other words that are used like that to describe someone who's awakened. And another one is, you know, has kind of the similar, very technical, precise meaning. Someone who is such. It's exactly different between thus and such. I'll let you sort out. But what I like about this is that it's not a definition. It's not an identity. Who are you? Someone asks. And you just open your arms wide, you step forward, you have a big smile, and you say, I'm such, I'm thus. And it's the most honest thing you can say. Anything else divides up the pie. Anything else limits who you are. Of course, you know, if in context it might be helpful to give them some more precise idea. You know, I'm a, when are you? I'm a plumber. Oh, we need you. We have a real problem here, so thank you for being a plumber. You know, and you know, you do them a disservice if you say I'm such, you know, when you have a plumbing problem. But there's something also very profound about this. And the Buddha wasn't a plumber. So he can get away with saying, I'm thus, and convey something very profound.

And to go back to this idea that I keep pointing to, emphasize that a tree, a plant that's growing, it's artificial for us to separate out the parts. That's a human construct. Right. All the parts of a tree, of a plant, are all working somehow or other to one whole harmony. They all work together, and they're not thinking, oh, that's a lousy leaf up there, and, you know, it should really, you know, needs to kind of get more green, or it needs to kind of be turned a little bit differently, and, you know, and I prefer my roots. I'm partial and poor leaves to feel left out and ignored. And the tree doesn't do this. We do it to ourselves in all kinds of ways. But the tree, the plant, is a whole. A whole that organically you don't make sense to make it as too much distinction between the parts. In fact, the tree is whole together with the environment. There's a way of looking upon it that doesn't make sense to really treat them as separate. They all operate together. It's remarkable sometimes to go walking in the forests. I find it remarkable where these thick forests, there's not much light coming down to the ground. But there are some plants growing there. And to see the plants that grow under the canopy, they have been shaped. And how they position themselves and how they all to maximize the light. The plants that get lots of light, they make different shapes and leaves and different arrangements. Everything is made. Everything is created in this environment that we live in as part of the whole. And so this idea of whole suchness belongs to this deeper operating system.

And to call it a womb, in my mind, is a direct reference to each of us once upon a time. It's been said, we're in a womb. And you grew in that womb. And you grew and you grew. And

it was something that was growing. Right. It was not something being engineered. It was something that was whole every step along the way. Every step along the way, it just was what it was supposed to be. And you were born. Amazing thing to be born out of this amazing organic living system of life that's produced in a woman. And most people, when they see a newborn baby, unless there's some problem, see the baby as whole. They allow the baby to be who they are. And so what if the Dharma practice is to discover how we're whole, as opposed to getting initials after your name, like, you know, Charlie Essie, stream-enter. We're going to make a lot of money because we're going to sell those credentials. We'll have little cards for people, you know, SE, and it'll be great. It won't be great. There's no attainments. There's the releases. There's the releases. There's the letting go, there's the act of profound generosity of allowing yourself to be yourself. Letting go of this operating system, the constructed one, that really interferes with a deeper harmony, the deeper attunement, the deeper growth, the deeper beauty, the deeper *anukampā* care, that I do associate a lot with, the care that the person who has the womb, who carries the baby, offers. It's profound, maternal, paternal, parental care that we have this capacity. This is the domain of the practice. This is what we are opening to and discovering. This is why the tradition talks about liberation and freedom so that we can shed... evaporate, dissolve, compost, absorb, all these ways in which we divide ourselves, lose ourselves, all these ways in which we get caught up in clinging and grasping and attachment to identities and all kinds. To learn to let go of an obsession with control, obsession with perfection, obsession with fear, obsession with shame, obsession with feeling inadequate. There's so much we can let go, to trust, to come into harmony, to come into the beauty, to come into the care, to enter the flow of the current. To really walk the path, the middle way that I like to think of is that gap, that open space that's right here in front of you for your next step. Where is it that you can step where you find your freedom, that you're not holding on, that you're not putting up resistance, that you're not hating or clinging? It's possible to feel it, to sense it, and to step into it with all our being. All of us comes along on this path. Bring all of you to it. And maybe this word ardency that came up this afternoon, I talked about it being wholehearted, but maybe we can call it bringing all of yourself along. Because without that, how can you come into harmony? How can you become attuned?

And so liberation, and as I said earlier, words, *paṭinissagga*, the word for relinquishment, also means generosity. *Cāga*, word that means generosity, also means freedom, let go. And maybe you understand the close connection between liberation and generosity. If you understand it's all part of this deep operating system. That's about wholeness, beauty, goodness, care, compassion, love, a faith in our capacity for wholesomeness, goodness. Trusting,

learning how the wholeness of who we are includes our environment, includes others, that we can't really care for ourselves unless we also care for the world around us. To be attuned, to be in harmony, it's not just personal. It's interpersonal. It's transpersonal with the world all around us. It's a profound thing what we're doing. And that maybe the words we use make a difference. And maybe if meant to be brought together and altogether, all these wonderful rich words that I see coming out of the Buddha's mouth to give you a sense of this is how this gives you maybe a sense of feeling, a... how this Dharma practice can unfold for you. And the orientation, the resonance, the alignment, the way to attune yourself to the practice, because that makes a difference. And it makes the practice a lot more easy. And maybe it helps you to become whole as you practice all of yourself included. And your full range of how you can grow and mature as a chance to happen. So those are my thoughts, was the conclusion for this thought, this retreat. And that talks longer than I planned, but we'll do now a couple of the standard things we do. We'll start with Peter, both at the manager's announcements and ride sharing. Do you have the mic?