

## Dharmette: Know for Yourself (4 of 5) Harm vs Flourishing

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So, good morning, or hello, and welcome to this fourth talk on a very famous teaching of the Buddha that's usually called the teachings to the Kalama, the Kalama people. So, the *Kālama Sutta*. And here he gives five criteria in which to know for yourself what to do. And it's not exactly the same as to know what to believe, but to what to do. And that includes to know not what to think exactly, but how to think, or what comes along with thinking, with what comes along with speaking, how we speak. And so it's a criteria for action, for activity, that is also applicable to the kind of subtle or unusual activity that happens in meditation.

And these five criteria that he offers is a guideline also to be used kind of as in guiding ourselves into deeper and deeper or fuller and freer and freer meditation practice or spiritual practice. So of the five criteria, what we've done so far was first as wholesome and unwholesome. And then to be aware of what feels like it's at fault. We have a core instinct to feeling something is off. This is at fault. This is not right. Or what is faultless.

And then out of a kind of the third thing, which is a little bit more out of a deep self-respect, is to, is this something that is valued or not valued, appreciated or not appreciated, praised or not praised by the people we respect a lot. Respect for their wisdom, their ethics, their kindness. And out of self-respect, we wanted to kind of do those things that the people we value a lot, demonstrate or manifest in how they live, that this is the way to be. So it's not just purely self-referential, this idea of knowing for yourself what to do. There is a reference point to others. And then today, the topic is, does it cause harm or does it bring benefit?

And so one thing to say about these five criteria, we'll do the last one tomorrow, they do not include pleasure and pain. And so we're not using pleasure and pain as the guide for what to do and not do. It is not a pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. It's not an avoidance of pain for, just because all pain is wrong. There's ways in which pleasure is pleasure, but also can

cause harm. Also, that pleasure which is not wholesome, that we're not, that's a little bit at fault or a lot at fault.

There's a way in which pleasure is not an expression of self-respect or not something that the people whose opinions and association is really important for us. And sometimes things that are really wholesome to do might cause some discomfort, might be even painful. But it just seems so valuable and important to do it. If someone is, you know, there's all kinds of things we sacrifice and willing to feel uncomfortable just to help other people. And so it's painful, but it's a whole something to do is to help someone. Maybe you need to sleep, but your neighbor needs to get to the emergency immediately, or they're going to die.

And so, you know, you're not going to say, I can't bother because it's so uncomfortable to miss out on my sleep. You willingly deal with the discomfort of lack of sleep in order to get them to the hospital. So pleasure and pain are not used as criteria, and that's a little bit unusual. I think a lot of people are deciding things based on pleasure and pain. What this fourth category is, it does it cause harm or does it bring a flourishing, a benefit, a deep sense of well-being for people? And what's interesting around harm is is that, to kind of understand what that means, is that maybe harm and hurt are two different things.

That I can feel hurt by what someone says or does, but I'm not harmed by it. I'm not injured by it. It feels uncomfortable. It feels something is off, but I'm not injured. I can feel grief. So grief is, there can be involved sense of hurt or strong discomfort, but I'm not harmed by the grief, not injured.

And harm is when it interferes with the functioning of people's lives in a way, from having been wounded or injured in some way, that emotionally injured. So we can't just kind of hold it sparsely or openly or willingly, or it actually interferes with our ability to function in the world. And this is a very important distinction because some people don't make that distinction. And so they treat every hurt as a harm and then go on a bandwagon, you know, on a mission to right the wrong or to criticize someone else. But I think that ordinary human life involves sometimes feeling hurt. And it doesn't have to be a problem for us. There might be something needs to be rectified and talked about with someone. But nothing's really been injured. And sometimes the injury has been huge. And we have to then, there needs to something else.

So to be sensitive to what harm is, And sometimes we can't be responsible for how other people might feel hurt. That might have to do much more about their background and their conditioning and situation than ours. There can be nothing at fault on our end. We might care for them and have compassion and understanding for them if they feel hurt. But we

haven't harmed them. So there's a difference between hurt and harm.

So we don't want to harm, we don't want to injure, we don't want to diminish, we don't want to undermine people's ability to live a full life. So we want to be... So does this cause harm to myself? Does it cause harm towards others or to both self and others? Be careful with that. Instead, what the direction of Buddhist ethics is, is well-being. is benefit to welfare, where we really know what the deepest, greatest welfare is.

Just providing pleasure to someone so they can kind of relax with a pleasure and feel delighted. It could be wonderful at times, but it also doesn't really touch the deepest well-springs of well-being, of fulfillment, a deep satisfaction in life, or a deep sense of at-homeness and aliveness, vitality, a sense of inherent meaning and purpose, or a deep sense of wholeness, fullness. a way in which healthy emotions kind of seem to saturate us in an uninterrupted way. There are deep states of well-being that can exist independent of the conditions of our life, so that we can actually be in situations that are quite physically uncomfortable, maybe even socially uncomfortable, but we can still be rooted in a deep sense of well-being, that someone now has to kind of navigate the difficulty of the social or the physical environment. But we know where the deep well-being is. So sometimes some of you, maybe if you meditate regularly, have come out of meditation. Maybe you're calmer, more peaceful than usual, maybe a little more contented. and maybe for the next 15 minutes or something, things can happen. But around you, someone says something or something happens, and it doesn't really affect that deep sense of calm or contentment you have because that seems to exist on its own. And you can see there's a difference that the external environment doesn't have to affect this deep sense of well-being.

So in Buddhist practice, we're learning about in deeper and deeper ways, full and fuller ways, what the true well-being is or the best forms of well-being, the forms of well-being that are not tied or completely dependent on the conditions in the world around us. And how do we support this well-being in others? How do we do this for support ourselves? There's a relationship between them. And there are ways of setting up the environment around us, our relationship to others, how we treat people, how we involve them, that can feel really good and wholesome... that helps support us to really feel, oh, this is really beneficial. This is a deep ah, not the ah of pleasure or relief, but the ah of something really deeply true way of being, really sense of completeness or wholeness or unconflictedness of just being alive as enough here, now, present.

So the criteria here that Buddha is offering, does it cause harm or is it benefit? So when we involve other people, is what we're saying to them? Certainly we can ask us to hurt them.

We don't want to knowingly hurt people, because then it's harm maybe. But is this going to be harmful for people or is it going to be beneficial? And it could be as simple as... you know, someone spends a lot of time making you a meal. And it turns out the kind of meal that you really don't like a lot. But they spend a lot of time and love and care making the meal. So you say, oh, you know, that's disgusting. I can't eat that. That's kind of, certainly causes hurt, might even cause harm for their capacity to that person's generosity and love, care and inspiration.

Or do you say something beneficial and say, with enthusiasm, I'm so appreciative and grateful that you would go to the time to make this thank you. with no comment about the fact that it's not a dish that you really don't like. And you eat it. It's uncomfortable, but because you've been doing mindfulness practice, you know how to hold discomfort. You know how to just kind of allow it to be there. And there's something much more deeper involved, a deeper sense of source within that knows what's important, even for yourself, and for you to get worked up around it. you know, not getting what you prefer worked up because it's not your, you know, to your pleasure, that's worked up. You're losing something, losing touch or some deep welfare in yourself, that deep sense of well-being where, of course, you want to care for the other person and be careful what you're saying.

So a harm or benefit, harm and welfare is I like to call this one flourishing. Does it harm people or does it help them flourish? There's an enthusiasm in Buddhism for the flourishing, for a sense of abundance. The Pāli word for abundance is *vipula*. There's even a word for it. And the Buddha instructs us to develop the wholesome to the point of abundance, point of fulfillment.

And so you might want to consider these things, these concepts I've said today, might be interesting to explore the difference between hurt and harm. Maybe have conversations with people. I don't want my words, my teachings about it, to be the last word about this. It's just my opinion. But also this distinction between harm and benefit. What's the best benefit? What's the deepest, fullest benefit that we can provide others and they can provide themselves? And that's another interesting conversation you can have with people. What is really beneficial and what benefits are really the ones that are worth flourishing in. So thank you very much. And we'll have one more talk tomorrow in the *Kālāma Sutta*.