

## Dharmette: Know for Yourself (5 of 5) Happiness

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Hello and welcome to this final and fifth talk on the *Kālama Sutta*, the Buddha's teachings to the Kālama people, where he offered an alternative to searching for spiritual truths in abstractions or relying on other people or other books to tell us what the truth is. For the Buddha, the truth that he was most interested in was practical, immediate, and something we can experience and know for ourselves experientially. For that purpose, he offered five experiential criteria, or close to experiential criteria. He offered: is what you're doing, what you could know for yourself, wholesome or unwholesome? Is what you're doing experienced as being faulty or not faulty, somehow off or not off? Is what you're doing something you're proud of, does it match your degree of self-respect?

That's known through the eyes of the people you most respect. If they know what you're doing, would they appreciate that, or would they not? And then, is it bringing about harm? Is it harming someone, yourself or others, or is it bringing about greater welfare, well-being? The final criteria is: does it involve suffering or does it involve happiness? Does it bring suffering or does it create more suffering? Does it bring happiness?

This is one of the primary qualities, characteristics, experiential values of Buddhism: the capacity to experience a profound sense of well-being, of happiness, and to be free of the opposite, to be free of a certain kind of emotional pain that arises because we're attached, because we're clinging, grasping, because we're holding on to something—that things have to be this way or no other way. Sometimes what we cling to is the truth: this is true, this is the truth. Maybe it's true, but the grasping to it, the attachment to it, is suffering, is stressful. It is possible, if something is true, to hold it not in a tight fist, but hold it with an open hand, and let it rest in that open hand. So it's not a weapon, it's not something that we close down around, but it's offered to the world, to ourselves, kind of lightly and freely. We don't have to desperately cling to what is true.

The truth that the Buddha was focusing on in this *Kālama Sutta* was the truth of what we can know for ourselves in direct experience. We can know for ourselves when we're suffering, when we're clinging and holding tight. We can know for ourselves what it's like not to cling, not to grasp, to open up, and to breathe freely. The hand is kind of happy if it's open and relaxed and at ease. The word *sukha*, which I'm translating here as ease, as happiness, in some contexts is translated as ease. And *dukkha*, translated as suffering, in some contexts, is called dis-ease, kind of a psychological-spiritual dis-ease.

The alternative of that is a spiritual, psychological ease that we have as we go through our lives. The whole point of Buddhism, the Buddha's teaching, is to bring suffering to an end. Oddly enough, he doesn't say the goal of Buddhism is to be happy, though someone who has brought suffering to an end is described as a happy one. But that's not the goal, in a sense, because that makes it a thing. It makes it too easy to have some idea of what it's supposed to look like. What it's supposed to look like is the absence of suffering and the relief, the ease, the well-being that comes from that.

Then we allow it to be what it is. We don't need to have any criteria for what this deep sense of ease, well-being, happiness is. Maybe in different contexts, situations, it's very different what that feels like. Our life is varied and life is challenging. The forms and shape this ease and happiness takes varies from situation to situation. If we have some idea that there is a tight idea of what happiness is and is supposed to be like, then we might actually be limiting ourselves from the full range.

So to study, to be able to notice, am I suffering or am I happy? This is a very honest self-assessment process. What some people find very inspiring is that this is a practice where we honestly show up and recognize, I'm not happy, I'm suffering. This is, I'm stressed right now. That's taking it, sitting down or standing and really taking some moments to really, yes, this is what is happening. Not to be collapsed under the weight of it, not to have self-pity around it or be caught in it or believe in it necessarily.

But this noble thing of stepping up and saying, yes, look at this, and kind of be grounded and centered and calm and in a wholesome way, in a beneficial way, in a way that the wise people in your life would appreciate, that how honest you are, how present you are, this is what's happening. I'm suffering. I'm suffering. Someone might say, wow, that person is suffering, but they didn't seem to mind so much. They seemed to be able to take a stand and be fully there in the midst of that, rather than living under the weight of it. So how are you showing up for suffering?

This idea of criteria—are you happy or suffering—is not so that we drown in our suffering, but

we can wake up to it. We can be honest about it and clear. In that clarity, in that showing up, in that stepping into the fact, oh, look at me, I'm suffering, almost as if you're opening your arms—yes, this is what's happening. Simultaneously, you're beginning to make space, room for happiness, for well-being and for ease. One of the real key aspects of mindfulness practice is to be so mindful, so fully present that when you're suffering, you are not the sufferer. Rather, you really have a clear sense that this is a mind with suffering.

This is a heart with suffering. This is what it's like to be alive with suffering, with the implication there's so much more here than the particular suffering we have. The very fact that you can be mindful of it means that part of you is not suffering, the part that's clearly mindful and present. There's always going to be parts of you which are not suffering. If we don't identify or get too preoccupied or caught in what's difficult psychologically, then it can seem like this is who I am. But there's no need to define ourselves or to see this is who I am.

This is the magic of mindfulness: that with mindfulness, you'll always recognize, with strong mindfulness, that whatever you're feeling in the moment, in terms of suffering, does not define you. But you're honest about it. This is being alive with suffering, accompanied by suffering, having pieces of suffering at the same time. You're always bigger than your suffering. There's always more. This idea of being mindful is kind of stepping into the fullness of who we are.

Yes, I am suffering, or better, because what I'm saying today, there is suffering here. Look at this. In that movement of real, there there's ease, there's space, and there there might even be a light. There might even be a smile. It's possible to smile. And they're recognizing that you're suffering. You're recognizing the mind's peculiar foibles, difficulties that the poor mind has.

So it's possible to know for yourself. It's possible to know for yourself a path to freedom, a path to happiness, a path to the wholesome, a path to what's beneficial. It's possible to find it moment by moment. To be your own teacher that way makes a world of difference. Becoming part of the purpose of mindfulness is more and more and more: become your own teacher so you find your way to freedom, to happiness. You know how the practice does it. The practice becomes your own. It doesn't become someone else's practice.

If the Buddha came along and said, you know, I changed my mind. You can stop being mindful, stop being aware. You would just say, well, maybe that's right for you, but I know for myself that this practice of showing up with mindfulness really makes a difference. It's much better than the alternative. So, thank you. I hope that this *Kālama Sutta* teaching has been meaningful for you, and it's certainly one of the, I think, very powerful teachings that come

down to us from this ancient tradition. Thank you.