

Accomplishment in View

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So this evening, you know, continuing with this Sun Sutta, these accomplishments that are symbolized by the dawn before the sun rises that prepare us to embark on this noble eightfold path. And the accomplishment that I'll speak to tonight is the accomplishment in view in *samādhiṭṭhi* and *samaggī* defined last night as complete. It has this root related to bringing things together. So we can consider it as a complete view. It's also sometimes referred to as wise view or right view.

And it's interesting because here we have this accomplishment in wise view and complete view as that which prepares us to embark on this Eightfold Path and it's also the first step on the Eightfold Path. It's also the last of the Four Noble Truths. And so there's a way that there very much is this fullness here, this bringing things together. And really, the perfection of this view is awakening, is enlightenment. It's when we're able to see things so clearly that the mind and heart are freed from suffering. And there's this absence of greed and hatred and delusion in the mind and heart.

We're just really able to see what's here and be with it. Ajahn Sumedho described the teachings of the Buddha as the understanding of the way things are and being able to look to be awake. So I thought I'd just begin by reflecting on view itself. This idea of view as a seeing, a way of looking and orientation. And how we see the world relates to how we behave in the world, how we act in the world, how we're relating to our experience. And it can be so easy to get fixed in view, you know, rather than really understand that everything we experience is filtered by our conditioning and so often distorted.

And then when we don't see that, that filter, that conditioning, we can be stuck in this fixed perception of who we are and who others are and how the world is. I really love Gil's analogy of the tent, the small tent and the big tent, because fixed view can be like that. It can limit our

understanding of ourselves and others and the world, and it can be claustrophobic. And yet we do it, I think, for many reasons, but one, because it can give us a sense of stability in this ever-changing world. So we can cling so tightly to a view of things. And we see all the time how so much violence and hostility and conflict can be caused by fixed views, by clinging so tightly to these views.

And it can feel like death maybe for some if their worldview is challenged in some way. When I was a graduate student, I worked on water politics and water justice issues and the ways in which people kind of collaborate and there's conflict around water. And I spent a lot of time in one particular watershed and I was going to all these management meetings and people coming together trying to figure out how to manage these shared waters where there's so much limited supply, especially in the American West, which is where I've worked most. And it was really interesting because, you know, everyone's talking about what they think is the same thing, like seems kind of benign, like water. But if you talk to, and I did because it was part of my research, an irrigation district manager, they would be really thinking about water in terms of cubic feet per second, something you can abstract from the landscape and commodify. And a tribal member, I've worked with the Warm Springs Tribal Federation, and they would consider water like their spiritual and cultural lifeblood, you know, just intrinsic to who they are as a people.

And environmentalists would have a kind of different notion of what they meant by water. So, but no one would ever talk about, well, this is my view of water. We would just all talk about water. And then, you know, you can imagine the kind of conflict that would arise and people would be confused why we were arguing about something when it seemed like the same thing. And so here we are with all of these different views, all these different views and to be able to see clearly that it's a view, that gets us so much farther along. The Buddha said that those who cling to perceptions and views wander the world offending people.

I would have loved to have had that in those boardroom meetings, on the wall. Those who cling to perceptions and views wander the world offending people, like right now. And often-times we don't even see the view as a view until it's challenged in some way. I think travel is a really nice way to kind of jostle our normative worldviews. I think also of those early ethnomethodologists who would have people do things like stand with their backs to the doors in elevators to just see how it would make other people uncomfortable. I called it breaching experiments.

But it's those moments where we don't even know we have this kind of view that you're supposed to stand in an elevator looking at the door until someone doesn't do it. So there's a

difference between having a view and clinging to a view. We need some wisdom to get started on the path. And it's completion. Like I said, this complete view, wise view, is this abandonment of all clinging to views, to wanting anything to be different than it is. But when we begin, we can start with this intellectual or conceptual kind of grasp of the Buddha's teachings.

So we commit here to being open to seeing for ourselves, you know, whether these teachings are true in our own experience. So in this case we could consider a wise view as a way of looking, being intimate with experience, a kind of grounded place from which we can see what's helpful, what's unhelpful, what gives rise to suffering, what ends suffering. Shelley spoke the other day about keeping it simple. He was like, keep it simple, sweetheart. And that's one way, you know, to keep it simple. It's really, it's about staying close to the experience, seeing where the suffering is.

Seeing where it isn't, learning from this. And then right there we have the Four Noble Truths. The first, that there's suffering. We have these bodies that are vulnerable, we have these hearts that are really tender. We ultimately lose that which is dear to us. It's part of this human experience.

And the Buddha called that *dukkha*, this suffering or this stress or just this sense of things aren't quite right. First noble truth. And then the second that this stress, this suffering, this *dukkha* exists because we want something different. There's a compulsive desire or a craving for something, something else than what's here. And then the third of the noble truths that there is a way out of this. And then we land in the fourth, the eightfold path with beginning with wise view.

This is from the suttas, what is right view? Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress. This is called right view. They're really, the Four Noble Truths, they're really practice instructions. You know, so here we are, we're practicing, we're keeping it simple, we're attending to the present moment, and then maybe we get sleepy or there's a pain in the body and we don't like that. And there's aversion, and then we can see right there how much more difficult it becomes when we add that resistance to what's happening.

So you see for yourselves, you know, and then that's how wisdom arises. We see for ourselves, we experience it for ourselves, and then it fortifies this cultivation of wise view. So there's kind of this circular nature, kind of reinforces itself. I love this quotation from Tibetan teacher Pema Chödrön. She writes, there's a common misunderstanding among all the human beings who have ever been born on the earth, that the best way to live is to try to avoid

pain and just try to get comfortable. You can see this even in insects and animals and birds.

A much more interesting, kind, adventurous, and joyful approach to life is to begin to develop our curiosity, not caring whether the object of our inquisitiveness is bitter or sweet. To lead a life that goes beyond pettiness and prejudice and always wanting to make sure that everything turns out in our own terms. To lead a more passionate, full, and delightful life than that, we must realize that we can endure a lot of pain and pleasure for the sake of finding out who we are and what this world is. How we tick and how our worlds tick. How the whole thing just is. If we're committed to comfort at any cost, as soon as we come up against the least edge of pain, we're going to run. We'll never know what's beyond that particular barrier or wall or fearful thing.

I love that piece because it just points to the liberation in learning from our experience. And this path is so much about learning, and it's what ennobles it, I think, to this real invitation and courage it really takes to connect with our suffering in this way. And it's such a beautiful teaching too, because if there is suffering or stress or whatever word you like to use, it's actually a sign that there's something not quite complete about the view. Like, for example, I live in a place where to get to the highway I have to cross this very small two-lane old bridge across the Columbia River, and it very often is getting worked on. Which means that I'll need to get somewhere, need to get somewhere, and suddenly I'll be waiting like an hour or more to get across the bridge, and there'll be all this agitation and impatience. And really when I investigate it, it's like this sense of, it's not supposed to be like this.

I'm supposed to be able to get across the bridge when I want to get across the bridge. And that's not seeing things as it is, as they are. What's actually happening is that there's road work, bridge work, and I'm not able to get across the bridge. So the suffering there, I'm not holding a wise view. There's a way I'm not seeing clearly. So it's actually a beautiful invitation when there's that internal conflict, when there's resistance.

We can learn from that. What is it that I'm not seeing? Sometimes I even like to ask in the day, now and again, just pause, is there anything wanting to be different right now? Is there any leaning in or away? If there is, then there's some contraction, some constriction there. Not being with the reality.

So with this complete view, seeing what causes suffering, we also get to see how it's resolved. And we get to see that it's possible to have a way of ease in the world as it is. This kind of inner shift, this orientation that allows us to be at ease with what's happening. And I actually love that this wise view is oriented in this way, that it's attenuated to suffering, to the Four Noble

Truths, because there's a heart quality to that, actually. I was thinking about Wise View in connection with the *Brahmavihāras*, with these abodes of the heart, because it sets us up to be at ease with the way things are. So there's this quality of equanimity.

And then when the heart meets the suffering, there's this desire, in a wholesome desire to end it, you know, this quality of compassion. And it's not with a rub in the mind, not like this shouldn't be happening, but this seeing of how suffering arises and how it's abandoned. There's some of you have probably heard the quotation attributed to this ninth century Chinese Zen monk who was asked by his followers what he's learned from this lifetime of practice and he answered to have an appropriate response. I think of that with respect to seeing how things are and then responding and this attenuation to suffering in our inner lives and externally. So I spoke to this one component of wise view, this letting go of craving, seeing the origin of suffering internally and externally, the Four Noble Truths, seeing, experiencing, learning from these. And another way to understand a complete view, a wise view, is to see conditionality, the conditioned nature of experience.

You know, we get close to our experience like we do in this practice, and we start to see that things done with greed, hatred, delusion, bring suffering, and that the opposite's true. So we have this ability to cultivate these skillful ways of being in the world. You start to see and feel what is wholesome. Think of the word *kusala* translated as wholesome or skillful or onward leading, beautiful. What's wholesome and what's unwholesome? There's one of the first teachings that the Buddha gave his son Rāhula was to reflect on his actions before he engaged in them.

You know, to really ask, are these skillful? Is there wholesomeness here? Is it beneficial? And then if he considered yes, you know, then while doing the action, consider, is it wholesome? Is it skillful? Is it onward leading? Is it beneficial? And then after the action, you know, is this skillful? Was this wholesome? So to really reflect on our actions. Now then we get to see. This is where wisdom comes in. We get to see the cause and effect. We get to reflect on the conditionality. What happens when we're generous and we follow that generosity? What happens when we act out in an impulse of anger? Probably all had those experiences of regretting the consequences of something. And we get to see this, you know, on this larger level too, I mean we can see how when there's a view of the world, the earth as a resource that we can exploit and mine and pillage and cut, we experience the consequences of that. And there's a lot of people out there who choose not to see that. But when we really open our eyes, we can see the consequences of our actions. We can see that we can't oppress certain segments of humanity and that not affect every one of us.

So this wise view is this orientation where we get to see that everything we do is consequential. And there's these choices that we can make along the way. And we can start to see our experience and ask those questions of ourselves that the Buddha encouraged his son to ask him, you know, as I'm considering this action, how does that feel? While doing the action, after the action, we can learn from that. So the Four Noble Truths, seeing into the origin, the cessation of suffering, and then seeing into causation and conditionality. And the wise view can also help us to see the impermanence of things.

When we practice in this way and we have fewer distractions and our minds can become a bit more quiet, we can really start to see more clearly how things are coming and going all the time. I remember one of my first retreats, I had been reading some of the Buddha's teachings. So I had learned, read about impermanence and thought, yeah, of course. And I remember I had a moment on retreat where I just experienced it. I felt like I practically ran to my practice discussion. I was like, everything's changing all the time. Like I was the first person to see that clearly, but it was probably a first for me at that time.

But it can be so liberating. You know, we have these bothersome thoughts or persisting pain and we know it's going to change. Everything and we know that it's it's futile to hang on to things too tight. I talked to a couple people today in discussions who were noticing just the preciousness of life, you know, the brevity of it and the preciousness of it because of its impermanence. And there's something so beautiful about that. I think that one of the real sacrifices that we have here in a culture that's so avoidant of death is that it prevents us from really touching how amazing it is to be alive when we aren't contacting death so much or so avoidant of it.

It's like we don't recognize how amazing, how rare, how precious. Now, there's a poem on impermanence that's from Jennifer Wellwood called *The Dakini Speaks*. It's, my friends, let's grow up. Let's stop pretending we don't know the deal here. Or if we truly haven't noticed, let's wake up and notice. Look, everything that can be lost will be lost. It's simple. How could we have missed it for so long? Let's grieve our losses fully, like ripe human beings. But please, let's not be so shocked by them. Let's not act so betrayed, as though life had broken her secret promise to us. Impermanence is life's only promise to us, and she keeps it with ruthless impeccability. To a child she seems cruel, but she is only wild, and her compassion exquisitely precise. Brilliantly penetrating, luminous with truth, she strips away the unreal to show us the real. This is the true ride. Let's give ourselves to it. Let's stop making deals for a safe passage. There isn't one anyway, and the cost is too high. We are not children anymore. The true human adult gives everything for what cannot be lost. Let's dance the wild dance

of no hope.

Hope is kind of a tricky word. And I think in this poem, she's speaking to kind of resting our confidence in the moment on something that we expect or want to happen in the future. It's not about not aiming for things or aspiring or wanting to put our energy into something beautiful. But it's that dance of, can I do that and be okay with things as they turn out? And that's a kind of action, I think, that is sustainable, that sustains us where we're just doing what we love because it's that appropriate response. And, well, a certain outcome would be nice. We don't need it to happen. We just do that next thing, that next appropriate response.

So wise view, complete view, you could basically give the whole of the Buddha's teachings in it, and I'm giving you quite a number. I'm going to offer one more in addition to the Four Noble Truths and impermanence and karma, cause and effect. And another is this insubstantiality of self, this idea of *anattā*. So everything changing, and this idea of myself constantly changing. No stable self here. And I like to think of it in terms of how we really can't be fore-closed. It's that claustrophobia of who we think we are.

You know, that tent that Gil referred to yesterday. That when we have any sort of conception of this solitary, isolated, fixed entity that is me, there's just a loss of the kind of wild mystery of who we actually are. That's beyond anything we can pin down into a static person here. There's a Buddhist eco-philosopher, feminist, wise woman, Joanna Macy. She writes, since every particle in your body goes back to the first flaring fourth of space and time, you're really as old as the universe. So when you're lobbying at your congressperson's office or visiting your local utility, or testifying at a hearing on nuclear waste, or standing up to protect an old grove of redwoods, you're doing that not out of some personal whim, but in the full authority of your 15 billion years.

I love that because really that's another thing we get to be intimate with when we're on retreat is starting to understand more clearly, you know, this nature of who we think we are. And we have these invitations to see how we're part of everything. You know, where do we stop and where does the rest of the world begin when we're breathing the air and drinking the water and made out of the particles that came from the first flaring forth of space and time? There's again this way of when we can really see through this stable sense of self that we're so habituated to identify ourselves by, that we recognize we're not so separate, that we really belong here. So this practice, this practice instructions of wise view leading to a complete view. Again, they're simple, just being with things as they are.

Bringing our attention to what's happening now. Noticing when we've gotten fixed in a view. I love those moments. It's very exciting. And we can really see all conditions, all experiences

as offering us these opportunities to wake up. You know, the hindrances, when we're tired, when there's doubt, when there's ill will, all the things that torment us, if they're really beckoning to us to pay attention, this is where we can learn. Where they can become transformed, where we can be transformed. I think of it as a kind of spiritual maturity, you know, to recognize that everything, every part of our experience and everyone can be a teacher and a teaching. Just keeping our metaphorical eyes open.

So I'd like to end with a poem by Dana Faulds called Allow. I think it really speaks to this practice, this cultivation of a complete view. This recognition of everything as teacher and teaching. There is no controlling life. Try corralling a lightning bolt containing a tornado. Dam a stream and it will create a new channel. Resist and the tide will sweep you off your feet. Allow. And grace will carry you to higher ground. The only safety lies in letting it all in. The wild and the weak. Fear, fantasies, failures, and success. When loss rips off the doors of the heart, or sadness veils your vision with despair, practice becomes simply bearing the truth. In the choice to let go of your known way of being, the whole world is revealed to your new eyes. Let's just sit for a minute together. In the choice to let go of your known way of being, the whole world is revealed to your new eyes. Thank you so much for your attention.