

Dharmette: Emptiness (2 of 5) Emtpy of Self

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So good morning and good day. Welcome to the second talk on emptiness, sometimes considered to be one of the most profound teachings of Buddhism. And the Buddha himself, and the suttas referred to, some of his teachings as being profound, deep, like the deep ocean of an empty or concerning emptiness. So this idea of emptiness is profound. And one of the entry points to this topic is the way that certain things are empty. The *suññā* in S-U... N-N-A.

And in the teachings, they're kind of almost like the representation of this experience of, or this idea of empty, is that of a delightful meditation, cabin hut, dwelling deep in the woods, safe, content, good place to sit and meditate. And the little hut is empty. There's nothing, just empty space. There's nothing to distract us, nothing to get caught up in, nothing to get involved in. Just sitting for the afternoon, maybe in an empty building.

And so the idea of inner meditation, becoming like that empty hut, becoming empty, and empty of what? Empty of distractions. Empty of distractions. Empty of preoccupations, empty of reactivity, empty of preferences for and against, empty of judgments, kind of empty of the things that keep the mind busy, spinning, going. And the... So to realize, to become empty of these things is not to become empty, you know, kind of stupid or something, but rather it's to allow a deeper freedom to be experienced, the freedom and well-being and all the benefits of that to come to us.

And one of the things we begin realizing as the mind gets quieter and we stop spinning and ruminating and thinking all the time, we start understanding how much the mind imagines things. We imagine the past, we imagine the future. To a certain degree, we're making up the past by telling ourselves the story. And even more so, we're making up the future. The future can't be predicted. Or we're living in fantasies that are made up, or we're living in judgments of things.

Some people spend most of their times judging what is right and wrong, and we're living in our projections. And sometimes these are about ourselves. We sit there ruminating about our problems, our difficulties, our view of self, and the mind is not empty of self, preoccupation. Not only is it not free of self-preoccupation, it's not free, it's not empty of the painful ways in which we think about ourselves, the critical ways, the undermining ways, the discouraging ways, these just kind of keep going. And they're kind of projections that we overlay on ourselves. They're projections we overlay on others.

Probably some of you have had the experience of people projecting onto you their prejudice, their bias, their assumptions, their interpretations, projecting onto you how you were a long time ago, not realizing how much you've changed. And so to begin appreciating how much we do this projection, we see through the filter of ideas, and that so much of what we actually touch, see, smell, hear, to some degree, an amazing degree, in and of itself, is already free of your self-ideas, your self-projections, your self-assumptions. And it's okay, you know, so I have this bell here, and maybe I can say it's my bell. And, but there's no me, my in the bell itself. That's an idea I have. And it's not even an accurate idea because it's more conventionally considered to be I.M.C.'s bell.

But the idea of possession does not exist in the bell itself. The bell is free of that idea. It's just an object. But if I'm caught in the spinning mind of possessions and being myself in mine and greed and desires, then there's no peace. So the world, so much of it is empty of the projections, and it turns out there's a delightful, liberating way to leave ourselves alone. To be able to not have projections onto ourselves, not project any kind of idea of me, myself, and mine, even ones that are accurate enough.

You know, it's, if I cut my fingernails, it's my fingernails I'm cutting, not someone else's. But once the fingernails are on the bathroom counter, then... I don't really think of them as mine in the same way as when they were on my body. They're kind of like, you know, an object there, like, you know, the toothpaste tube, which is right next to it. And it's, you know, it's conventionally mine in some way, but I don't spend much brain time thinking about my toothpaste tube. It's a kind of waste of my time.

I don't think about the clippings as mine. But also, I don't spend much of my time thinking about my fingernails being mine. And I don't find myself on my fingernails. But I could. But that's kind of a waste of brain power. And so we play this game of me and myself and mine a lot. It can fill our minds. It's possible through meditation to quiet that and not have that projection. Right?

And in Buddhism, the idea is that some of the deeper ideas of who we are of self, some idea of

an essential self, an essence of self, the idea of an ongoing, unchanging self is not really accurate. You can't be found there's a projection of it, there's a construction of that idea, there's a feeling of that idea. But that it's possible to really understand, quiet the mind enough, still the mind, and realize that, and watch and see the projection of self onto whatever is happening. And to appreciate, actually, without that projection, there's the experience of things just existing in their simplicity, without the projection of self, without the idea of self. And so he would say that the world is empty of self. The Buddha was explicit about that.

The world is empty of self and what belongs to self. Why could he say that? Why? Because he knew what happens when the thinking mind, the projecting mind, the constructing mind becomes quiet enough to see how much all ideas of self are a construction of the mind. They have some conventional role, value, and conventional truth to them, like this bell conventionally is I.M.C.'s bell. And, you know, it's the... that the glasses I have, kind of conventionally are my glasses. It's a little awkward if someone walks away with them and I don't see very well. But they don't hold it essentially. They don't have to be attached to that.

So part of this teachings of emptiness is to really appreciate how things are empty. Empty of projections, empty of ideas, empty of what the mind constructs, and even the idea of self is itself empty of self. So the primary empty that this practice is leading to is the idea that the world is empty of self. And in the Theravāda tradition, the primary way of understanding this is not conceptually, is not by logic that tells you that everything is constructed, everything arises conditioned dependent on everything else, and has no essence as an idea, but rather is a deep quieting of the mind to be able to perceive how in the present moment all sensations, all experiences, all thoughts in a certain kind of way are flowing and shifting and changing.

And it's in the impermanence, the inconstancy of things that we see so clearly. That when we have an idea, a projection, an assumption, a judgment, it's like painting with watercolors on the surface of a river. It doesn't stick, it doesn't go anywhere, it just kind of dissolves and evaporates or disappears. And in the changing nature of everything, there is no self to be found in anything, including in ourselves. And rather than being something that diminishes us or something that hinders us, or it actually frees us to be more intelligent, to be wiser, more sensitive, more caring for this world.

These are all ways, intelligence, care, creativity, are all things that flow within us when we don't live. Caught in their projections, assumptions, beliefs, opinions about me, myself and mine. To know and experience oneself as free of self, empty of self, as part of this teaching of emptiness. So thank you and continue with emptiness tomorrow.