

Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion in Daily Life

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I'll try not to repeat a lot of what you said, although I have covered some of the same ground. We didn't compare beforehand. In the commentaries, the teaching about this aspect of non-delusion or non-confusion focuses on being aware of the three characteristics that Inez described in a lot of detail: impermanence, *dukkha*, stress, and not-self. In the *suttas*, the earlier teachings, the teachings on non-delusion focus on just one of these characteristics, impermanence, *anicca*, pointing to a knowing, really knowing, that all experience has the nature of arising, persisting for some time maybe, and then vanishing. And I see impermanence actually as kind of the base for the other two, because everything is in flux, not static and not permanent, and that makes a permanent self not be possible. And at base, it's not being able to control this constant flow of life that gives rise to *dukkha*.

You know, we want to hold on to things. We want them to change in the way we like, or we want them to stay the same. It doesn't work, you know. So we could say that non-confusion or non-delusion in daily life means that we're keeping the *Dharma* in mind, these aspects of the *Dharma*, seeing our action through the lens of things being impermanent, not-self, and there being *dukkha*, recognizing whether we're acting in ways that are suitable to our purpose, which is to go beyond, you know, *dukkha*. And recognizing whether we're operating in our domain, you know, is to bring in the other aspects of clear comprehension. Are we operating in the dharmic field, not the karmic field, as Ajahn Suchito puts it?

So in daily life, you know, thinking of an example, I thought of someone maybe that we aren't really fond of asks us to go out to dinner, and we respond, "Oh, you know, I'm really busy," even though actually we aren't really busy. You know, there's this untruth there. And maybe the motivation for lying was to be kind to the other person, you know, not to make them feel bad, not to reject them. But still, you know, if we're having clear comprehension, it gives us

a little nudge in the conscience. You know, that wasn't really true. And we feel the *dukkha* of having lied.

And we can see how that's related, you know, it's related to what Inez was talking about, the three characteristics. We lied out of aversion, you know, one of the three roots of *dukkha*. We lied out of some aversion to going out to dinner with this person. Every action that we take that is unwholesome, unethical, that feels bad to us, you know, every action that gives rise to *dukkha*, it can be tied to one of these three roots of *dukkha*: greed, aversion, delusion. And they arise because we're not aware of those three characteristics of *anicca*, *anattā*, and *dukkha*, of impermanence and not-self and stress. So you could say that we lied because we didn't realize it would lead to *dukkha*. We were acting out of delusion. We weren't looking through a dharmic perspective.

So what seems most practical to me then in regard to avoiding being deluded in our approach to daily life is to cultivate attitudes and views that align with our understanding of the *Dharma*, our understanding of our spiritual path, to practice in our life what we know from our experience on the cushion and our study to be onward leading. That phrase that I like so much, what is onward leading? The texts on clear comprehension recommend cultivating the perception of impermanence, the perception of impermanence, coming to deeply know that everything in life is impermanent in a deep, a really deep way. And Inez spoke about that in the meditative context. The insight can arise that makes it so clear, you know, that it's just obvious that nothing can be clung to because it's all moving.

And in daily life, there are some other ways of working with coming into the awareness of impermanence. And one thing that I really highly recommend is a contemplation of what we call the five recollections, the five remembrances. And probably many of you are familiar with these. In *Theravādan* monasteries, the monastics chant them every day. And they're reminders directly related to what the Buddha originally saw when he was just a young man that spurred his intention to wake up. And I'm sure you probably know the story. It's often told.

The future Buddha, he was the son of some kind of nobleman. Sometimes they say a prince, but we don't really know. Someone with a lot of wealth and a lot of power. And his father had been told before his birth that his son would be either a great king or a great spiritual leader. And so he would either be someone very important in the karmic field or in the dharmic field, as Ajahn Suchito might put it. And the Buddha's father, of course, you know, he wanted the boy to follow him into worldly power. So he surrounded the future Buddha from his birth onward with all the sense pleasures of the karmic world.

Music and delectable food and beautiful girls and luxurious clothing and, you know, you name it, he could have it. And he was sheltered from seeing anything that could kind of create a chink in this sense that happiness could be found in satisfying sense pleasures. He wasn't allowed outside the palace walls where he might see, you know, a little more realistic picture of what life is like, what life can be like. And then when he was in his 20s, he was able to convince his charioteer to take him outside the walls of the palace where he lived. And he saw four things that moved him to change the direction of his life completely.

He saw someone who was ill. He saw someone who was very old, a rickety person and feeble, you know. And then he saw also a corpse, someone who had died. And he was really shocked by each of these. And he asked his charioteer, are these, you know, is this normal? And his charioteer told him, yes. You know, all human beings, all living beings, are subject to these three things: sickness, old age, death. Even living in a palace and being surrounded by luxury, there's no protection from those.

And then the fourth thing that the Buddha saw was a mendicant monk walking through the scene with his begging bowl, really serene in mind, unbothered by all that was going on around him. And seeing the serenity in the face of what was so distressing to him, the young man was inspired to leave the palace and find a path to freedom from the *dukkha* around all these kinds of impermanence. So these four sights are often called the four heavenly messengers because they had that effect on the young Gautama, to send him out into the direction of a heavenly abode, kind of a way of being free of *dukkha*. So he turned from the karmic field, you know, depending on sense pleasures for happiness, to the dharmic field, recognizing they aren't a secure source of happiness. And after six years of diligent practice, he awoke completely. He became the Buddha.

So I think, you know, regularly contemplating the truths that the young man confronted that day, they can be an inspiration to us as well to stay in the dharmic field, to look at our lives through a dharmic lens. The five remembrances or five recollections, they're often phrased like this in English.

I am subject to aging. I am not exempt from aging. I am subject to illness. I am not exempt from illness. I am subject to death. I am not exempt from death. All that I care about, all that I hold dear, I will be separated from. And then the fifth. I am the owner of my actions, born of my actions, heir to my actions, whatever I do for good or ill, to that I will fall heir.

So there are reminders about those three really universally experienced aspects of imperma-

nence and from the loss that they imply, losing all that we love. And a reminder about our action. It is our action in life that determines, you know, the results of our action. Is our action in life skillful? Does it tend to the benefit for self, for others, for both? Whichever it is, whether it's for benefit or for harm, we're going to feel what arises in the wake of that.

So keeping these in mind on a daily basis, I think it can have a really huge impact on our lives. And some of us, I know, have faced these directly, sometimes in really dramatic ways. And some of us are facing them now directly. But even if we're old and have had a threatening illness or are suffering now from life-threatening illness, it's still possible, I know, to hold on to the delusion that we are somehow not subject to death. We need to be reminded. And these reminders, you know, these five recollections, they are really good to keep with us, to keep close to us.

Keeping the awareness of death on your shoulder, you know, right by your ear, that's something that's encouraged by the *Dharma*. A few days ago, I was sitting at breakfast with my husband, John. And as I moved my left arm to pick up my coffee cup, I let out a little "ouch" because I've had a lot of pain in the shoulder the last week or so. And John said, "Oh, is that still hurting?" And then I said, "Yeah, I know it's still hurting." And then he said, "This aging thing, it has to stop." And we both know what that means, you know, if it's going to stop. That's maybe not such good news.

And since we're aware of the alternative, you know, we would actually prefer aging to continue. So we both, you know, we both started laughing. And I told him, "I'm going to put that in my talk, actually. This aging thing, it has to stop." Anything can happen at any time, as Joseph Goldstein has often said. And what arises for me when I confront that is a question that I ask myself many times a day. How do I want to be with this? What is the appropriate response?

Keeping the truth of impermanence close by, it can keep us really close to our deepest intention for our lives. It's not meant to frighten us. It's not meant to depress us, but to inspire us. Given that this is all going to collapse, you know, how do I want to be? How do I want to act in this world? Something to consider.

So Inez talked about the four *vipallāsas*, the four distorted ways of viewing things in life, these forms of delusion that all lead to greed and aversion, you know. They are delusion, and they lead to greed and aversion. And she mentioned a lot about these, so I'm not going to talk about them in detail so much. What I'm going to talk about is a way that the Buddha spoke about letting go of our greed, our craving for sense pleasures, for keeping things permanent, for all the ways that we fight against the truth of impermanence. We fight against the ways

that we identify with ourselves, I mean, we identify with other things as part of ourselves.

So one way to work with these distorted ways of seeing things is to ask ourselves, what am I getting from believing this, you know? In the teachings, this is referred to as the gratification. The Buddha talks about what is the gratification, the danger, and the escape from particular kinds of beliefs. So what's gratifying in believing that I'm always going to be strong and healthy? Maybe it's obvious. It feels kind of good to believe that, but let me tell you, it is deluded. It's kind of a rosy promise about the future.

But then, you know, what's the downside of believing that? Well, first of all, it's not true. And I'll be pretty disappointed if I, you know, if I'm counting on it. And it doesn't allow me then to be, you know, in harmony with my life as it actually is unfolding. I'm always going to be in some kind of stress. So that's the danger. And then how do I avoid the downside, you know, what's the escape? By not believing that I'm always going to be strong and healthy. By recognizing and accepting what is actually true. That's what the texts call the escape.

So we can ask this question, you know, what is the gratification? What is the danger, and what is the escape from the kind of thinking that is deluded, really, you know, that has us depending on the kinds of things that our culture says are going to lead to happiness? Or if that danger, that language, you know, gratification, danger, and escape, if that doesn't resonate, you know, what's the upside? What's the downside? And where's the freedom from this? And I think we can use the same approach with all of the *vipallāsas*, you know, all these delusions.

What is it that I get from believing that beautiful clothes are going to make me happy, you know? It's crazy. They're not going to make me happy. We can still enjoy having nice clothes if we have them, but whether our clothes are beautiful, that's got nothing to do with our happiness. What do I get from believing in a permanent self? You know, that's a big question. It's probably got many, many threads to it, you know, but the downside is, the downside is, you know, it's always something you have to defend. It's always something that's in danger of being broken apart because it is a delusion. Freedom from the downside, this insight into seeing the flow that makes up a life.

So all these questions, you know, what is the gratification? What's the danger? What's the escape? What's the upside, downside, and freedom? They are ways of keeping the *Dharma* in mind, you know, staying in the dharmic field, questioning the constant pull of the karmic field, you know, with all its bells and whistles, you know, its glittery surface. I remember the Dalai Lama once said, desire puts feathers on an object, you know, it kind of decorates things. But as we develop this clear seeing, full awareness, wise mindfulness, gradually we come to

see how much stress there is just inherent in our relationship to all the situations and objects and people in our lives that we have craving and aversion for now.

Gradually we lose our attraction to the karmic field, and we see more joy, more satisfaction in the peace and stillness that can come from becoming more simple and living our lives according to how things are actually unfolding. We want to relate to our experience in ways that help to undermine the distortions of mind that lead us to keep going round and round, you know, in the cycles of *samsāra*. We want to relate by applying clear comprehension. We want to broaden our vision from the bare bones of what we experience, what we encounter, to include the context, the implications of our actions.

So am I acting in my daily life right now in a way that is suitable for my purpose? It's a question we can ask. Am I looking at experience through the lens of the *Dharma*, or have I been trapped by greed, by hatred? Am I holding on to something here? Am I trying to nail down the river of experience? Or am I seeing, you know, am I in touch with the fluidity, the inconstancy that life is really made up of?

In daily life, you know, as one thing after another happens, as there's constant sense contact, it can be so useful to pay attention to the flow and to our, you know, our orientation. Are we bringing in a dharmic orientation to how we're navigating the world? This bare awareness, you know, the awareness of what's occurring at the sense doors, breathing and knowing that we're breathing, walking with the awareness of the sensations of walking, these are a really great starting place. You know, they're a foundation for beginning our practice, beginning both as a newer meditator and also in the sense of beginning a practice session.

But as our practice becomes more natural, as our minds begin to quiet, mindfulness becomes more nuanced. And this clear comprehension, it just becomes really important. And it becomes part of how we intuitively do our practice. And without clear comprehension, insight, you know, and freedom, they're just, they're not really possible. It has to be there. The ability to distinguish, to distinguish between what's skillful and what's not skillful, between the *Dharma* path and the karma path.

That is considered special to the *Theravādans*. That's how they were spoken of in the early days of Buddhism after the Buddha died, as the distinguisher. The *Theravādans* were called the distinguisher. And what they distinguished was, they distinguished between what was useful and what was not, between what was the path and what was not. And that's still a really big part of what we do today. We who have inherited this tradition, and clear comprehension is a really big part of that.

That's what I have, my part of today. And we can sit for just a brief moment and let the words kind of settle. Thank you for your attention. And just as a reminder, at 6:15, Inez and I will be leading a Q&A together here in the meditation hall. So hope to see a lot of you then. Till then, practice well, be well.