

## Dharmette: Don't Make It Worse

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So thank you all for being here. Very nice. And what I would like to offer is a little saying, the four words, that can now be such a useful thing to keep close by as a reminder when you do this practice here or try to live a wise life. And that's the words, "don't make it worse." Whatever you do, don't make the situation worse. And if you think it's important to make it worse, you should take a deep look and consider, is this really wise?

Just don't make it worse. You might not know what to do that's better. You might not be wise and caring or understanding. It might be mysterious. It might be too difficult a situation. And so you don't worry about that. Just don't make it worse.

And a few things about that is that it provides a wonderful path, because if you don't make it worse, it generally allows something to relax inside. It means you're kind of pausing. It means you're kind of not acting or speaking impulsively. And it gives all the space to relax, to settle. Right?

And as you relax and settle, then you have a difference. The standard for making it worse becomes more acute, more clear. If my shoulders are up in my ears by the tension, and I get a little bit more tense, I can see I'm making it worse to relax that much. But if my shoulders are really relaxed, now I can see there's a whole range of making it worse. That's much more than before. Right? So I'm more sensitive over time.

So just that simple practice of don't make the situation worse can begin giving you access to deeper ways of being at ease in this world, or being at peace, or settled. And the more at ease you are, the more this practice of don't make it worse reveals deeper and deeper aspects of how you react and how you respond and what you do. And you get to learn about yourself more.

In the earliest, what we think are the earliest records of the Buddhist teachings, the most ancient teachings in Buddhism, wisdom is understood to be wisdom about delusion. Wisdom about delusion, about how we get caught, how we cling, how we make the situation worse. As opposed to wisdom about grand philosophical ideas, wisdom about the great marvel of the philosophy of or the experience of emptiness, or great experiences of consciousness, or great experiences of oneness, or all these kinds of things that people consider ideals, are not really held up as being the central thing. Just don't make it worse. Understand how you make it worse. Understand how you cling.

And the reason I believe that that was the earliest teachings is that everything else in Buddhism arose, followed from that. Everything that Buddhism has to offer was built from that understanding. And that everything you need to know is based on that. Because if you understand how you cling, how you react, how you do second arrows, then maybe you won't do those things. And then when you don't do those things, the wonderful things begin opening up. Wonderful things begin happening.

And you don't need to know what those are going to be if they're wonderful. There's maybe many, many different possibilities. And you get to different days, maybe get to have different wonderful things. But if you think that the goal is one thing, to be one with the universe, then maybe you're lucky one day to have that. And the next day it's not that. What's wrong? I'm not doing the great thing, and it should be different, and steadily you're making it worse.

“Oh, I lost it. I have to get it back quickly.” And it's kind of embarrassing. “I'm not one with the universe. I hope no one else notices. I better hurry back.” Okay. And the mind gets such spinning out. And because a person hasn't learned about how they make it worse, how they do second arrows, how they cling, they don't see that they're kind of spinning out.

But if we're wise about how we get caught, then we see it right away. So, no thank you. Don't need to do that. Don't need to do that. And then, who knows, maybe being one with the universe isn't the flavor of the day. Maybe the flavor of the day is to just have love for everybody.

One with the universe, love. Which one will you choose? You don't have to choose. You just go along with whatever one, the flavor of the day. It might be profound peace. It might not be love. It might be compassion. It might be generosity. All kinds of things can happen.

I had one day recently, the flavor of the day was magic. It's just like all these things started to happen that, you know, that, I mean, I don't believe in magic, but they just seemed wonderfully delightful, or kind of a way of appreciating, wow, like all these coincidences, all these

things are happening. It's so nice. Anyway, so I called it magic. I don't know if that was the right word. I don't think I made the situation worse by doing that. I think I was just delighting. That was the flavor of that day.

So, not making it worse. And then using that not as just that, but learning from that, learning how we make it worse, learning what we're losing. Is it really worth the exchange? Is what we gain by making it worse better than what we had? How is it that what we had was good? Oh, it wasn't good, but it was good enough. It wasn't that good, but it's better than making it worse.

Because there are days, you know, when things are wrong, and rather than the magic day, it's just a tragic day, or it's an everything-goes-wrong day. And we don't call that magic, but an everything-goes-wrong day is, I don't know, just a bummer day. Those days, we have those days too. And don't make it worse. Just don't make it worse.

This expression, "don't make it worse." Maybe it's a, I don't know where it, you know, maybe it arose in different places independently. But how I first heard it was that it was incarcerated men in the state prisons who had developed this piece of wisdom for their situation. Just don't make it worse. Okay.

And for them, that contrast is so bad. They're in a worse situation. They're in a terrible situation. The whole context of their life is horrible. And they're being treated terribly sometimes by the guards, treated terribly by the other inmates. Their circumstances are, you know, just, you know, how they live, what they eat, everything. You know, it's a kind of very difficult life.

And for them to have that as a piece of wisdom is in a very different context than, you know, someone whose life is much better than that. "Just don't make it worse." And they add the word "just." Just don't make it worse. Just don't make it worse. It's bad enough. Just don't make it worse.

And some people, some of the men, would make it worse. They'd get angry. They would, you know, say something or do something kind of mean or angry to the guards. Right? And they were making it worse for themselves. Then they were locked up, or all kinds of things happen as a result. So just don't make it worse.

So I hope this is not a bummer of a teaching today. It's meant to be the opposite. It's meant to be something very simple you can do that can apply almost everywhere you go, and maybe it's easier than making it better. We never quite know how to make it better, but certainly make it better if you can. But at least don't make it worse.

And then, as I said to someone recently, if you have the capacity, the mental capacity, the intelligence to make it worse, you have the mental capacity and intelligence not to do it. Isn't that great? So however intelligent you are, maybe you don't have, maybe you have just a teeny bit of intelligence, just enough to get by. That's what you're using to make things worse. So you have all the intelligence you need to make it better. I hope that's encouraging.

So, thank you. And now we're going to do...