

Deepening Inner Practice Leads to Outer Peace

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May 31, 2026

Keywords: *Dharma*, awakening, peace chaplaincy, *Mettā Sutta*, *Discourse on Loving-Kindness*, loving-kindness, mindfulness, hostility, welfare of the whole world, Buddha

Yeah, good morning everyone. For those of you in the outer hall, if some of you are so far away, there are probably another six chairs in here. If you want to come and sit in a chair, or there's space on the floor if you want to come closer. So welcome everyone, and I'm happy to be here.

I've been gone for quite a while from IMC, it feels like. And so it's nice to be back here and back in this community with all of you. Happy it's a potluck, potluck to come back to. And I've been off kind of on a vacation for almost a month. And I spent about three weeks of the month hiking. And we called it a pilgrimage. So it was very nice.

And I didn't give much thought to IMC or Dharma talks or such things. But the one thing I did give thought about was that actually, starting tomorrow, together with two colleagues, I'm beginning a new program having to do with peace chaplaincy. And so this whole idea of peace, and maybe being a chaplain, offering spiritual care in the context of conflict, has been very much on my mind. And I took notes about it, wrote some kind of an article about it or an essay, my paper thing. And that's the only thing I have in my mind, so that's what I'll share.

And so one of the interesting, I think very interesting, phenomena in the early teachings of the Buddha is that the two emotional states, or psychological states, that are consistently, and maybe only, associated with full awakening, the goal of Buddhist practice, of becoming fully mature in this practice, are happiness and peace. And sometimes the idea of enlightenment, awakening, liberation can have a lot of grandiose kind of ideas of what it involves. And we might lose sight that one of the primary characteristics and purposes of this maturation in the *Dharma* is to be a person who has a deep abiding sense of happiness and sense of inner peace.

But this inner peace is not a private affair. It's not something that is just held and contained within the person who has it, but it spills out. It has an orientation, a movement out into the world to relate to, to understand others. We're deeply social beings, and so the deep inner peace that we can attain in this practice has social consequences. It becomes maybe the gift of an awakened person to the world, that they share their peace, their happiness.

There's a concern for the well-being of others that's quite deep. It comes as a natural expression of that peace. It's almost like this, that peace can't just stay contained within oneself. There's a movement outward into the world with it.

When the Buddha, there's an amazing discourse, a very little series of poems that are attributed to the Buddha, that are said to be some of the oldest pieces of literature in Buddhism, before there was a lot of embellishment of who the Buddha was and ways that sometimes became more than human. And in this very human depiction of the Buddha in these texts, he talks about instances in the first person. And he talks about his own distress, the way he was dismayed and shaken and afraid when he looked around the world at his time, and he saw that there was conflict and violence everywhere. He didn't see any place where there was settlement without there being turmoil. And it's quite a touching kind of description, so I want to read some of it for you.

It begins this way: "Violence gives birth to fear. Just look at people and their quarrels."

In the history of Buddhism, the Buddha was considered to be kind of a superhuman, you know, the perfection of all human qualities. And even before he was a Buddha, he was already perfected, and he had no shortcomings at all. And so to admit that the Buddha was shaken and dismayed didn't go over very well as Buddhism developed in history and in India. But here in these earliest texts, we can imagine this man in a world back in the Bronze Age, I guess, and a lot of poverty, no social services, and a lot of violence.

"I will speak of my dismay in the way that I was shaken, seeing people thrashing about like fish in little water, and seeing them feuding with each other. I became afraid. The world is completely without a core. Everywhere things are in turmoil. Wanting a place of my own, I saw nothing that was settled. I felt discontent at seeing only conflict to the very end.

I saw an arrow here, hard to see, embedded in the heart; pierced by this arrow people dash about in all directions. When the arrow's pulled out, they don't run and they don't sink. Don't pursue what the world's knotted up in. Having fully pierced sensuality, train

| in your full release.”

We don't usually imagine, even before he was awakened, that this is a person who would be afraid. So discontent at seeing conflict to the very end. I don't know exactly what that means, but I mean, how many of us have looked around the world and seen conflict? I mean, I'm kind of an old guy now, and war and conflict has been a constant companion throughout my life. Not necessarily that I lived in places of war and conflict, but the world around me. And it has kind of shaped who I am to some degree.

World War II had a big impact. I was born afterwards. But my parents, my family, my in-laws all were deeply infected by it. I grew up in the shadow or in the stories of World War II in Europe. And then the Vietnam War was huge for me because I was at a draftable age. And so there was a real possibility that I'd be drafted, and so the whole contending with the Vietnam War and the draft and violence and war, and would I serve if I got drafted or whether I would be a conscientious objector, was a huge thing.

And then over and over again, this war and some of this conflict, like what we have in Palestine, has been going on for 100 years now almost. It depends how you count. It doesn't seem to be any end in sight. “I felt discontent at seeing only conflict to the very end.”

So here he talks about that he saw something. He saw all this dismay in the world out there. And trying to contend with it and contend with his own fear, what he discovered was in his own heart that there was an arrow. Some people translate it as a dart, since arrows kind of dig into your heart. And so this piercing pain, this sharp arrow, arrowhead embedded in the heart, is speaking about the pain of attachment, pain of craving, greed, hostility, divisiveness that many people carry inside one way or the other. And that that was a source of it all.

Rather than the source being lack of social services, let's get more of them, it was something deep psychological in ourselves. And to be able to pull that out was what the Buddha discovered is possible, and we can train to do this. So that was what, you know, at one end of his life, forty-five years of teaching, it was bracketed in beginning and end by his concern with violence and the challenges of this world that we live in. And he realized something very profound, that he had spent forty-five years teaching people how to pull this arrow out and discover this deep heart, have the heart deeply at peace, deeply happy.

The other end of the Buddha's life is kind of like bracketing the life. When he was dying, the world that he had spent his life in, the world for forty-five years of teaching in, was collapsing. The two primary countries that he had lived in during his teaching career were at war with each other, maybe the primary three countries he was in. There's a story of his last days

of him seeing that fortifications and war preparations were beginning, and that there was usurping of a king, that there was one king that was his good friend, and he was dethroned and then died just in the Buddha's own last years, last months of his life. The world was collapsing around him, and seeing and knowing this, he died peacefully.

So you could say the Buddha failed. You know, that he was supposed to be the savior of the world and bring peace to everyone. I don't think he ever saw himself that way. And I don't know if he offered his teachings to create a universal peace and solution for all of our human conflict, for his time or for our time. And perhaps to wish for that too much could be a form of attachment that prevents us from seeing and being with things as this world actually is, to want too much to create a universal solution to our challenges of our human lives.

Perhaps it's just a manifestation of that arrow that's embedded still in the heart, the attachment we still have. But that doesn't mean that someone who is mature in this practice becomes passive and does nothing. They can't do that. It's natural that how they go forth into the world is to create a better world. Living their peaceful way, their happy way, meeting people, being in conversations with people peacefully, not participating in or fueling the divisiveness in our society, is a huge thing. And so to be concerned with the welfare of everyone.

So soon in the months after the Buddha was awakened, he walked around India and met different people. And after some months, we don't know how many months, lo and behold, there were sixty people who had understood his teaching, had followed his teachings, and discovered this profound possibility of peace and happiness. He gathered those people together and said something to them. In saying this, Buddhism at that point became a social movement. Maybe even before it became a religion, it was just kind of a social movement.

And this is what he said to those sixty people. He said, "Go forth! Go out into the world for the benefit and happiness of humanity; out of profound care for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and humans. Go out individually, no two of you in the same direction."

Sixty people is a lot of people to send out across the plains of Northern India. Go out there for the welfare and happiness of the world. And one of the reasons he could send them out was that in attaining awakening, they had realized a very significant and influential degree of inner peace and happiness that became a reference point for what other people could do as well. It wasn't simply that providing people with social services, which is a wonderful thing to do so that they're less hungry or so they have better conditions. Really, the orientation is happiness is not having a TV, a better computer, a better phone. Happiness is found in your

heart.

And so someone who discovers that for themselves can imagine or know what is available and possible in other people's hearts as well. And want that for them, guide them towards that, or be a reference point for that. And so this peace and happiness of these mature people, it wasn't something that they were told to keep for themselves, but to use that as a reference point to go out and bring welfare and happiness, the ultimate welfare and happiness, to the hearts of other people. And so they were sent out to contribute to a more peaceful and happier society.

This is why I like to think of Buddhism as partly a social movement. And their inner freedom had become by its very nature a social gift. We are social beings in a very profound, uncontroversial way. And so regardless of how we are, we're going to have effect on our world, the world around us. If we're greedy, if we're divisive, if we're hostile, if we complain a lot, we spread something into the world which is a little bit toxic. If we're the opposite, we spread something else out.

This purpose of Buddhism and Buddhist people maturing in this practice, living for the welfare of others, is expressed in this wonderful quote that I've quoted many times because I like it so much. It's the Buddha's description of a wise person. And it's another characteristic of a fully mature person. They're considered to become a wise person. And this is also very humanistic, where sometimes some of the other languages of enlightenment can be seen as so grandiose or ultimate or complicated or metaphysical that it kind of loses touch with the humanity of who we are. But wisdom, becoming wise, is a pretty simple ordinary human thing to do. Hopefully you become wiser as you've aged over your lifetime.

So the Buddha describes a wise person: “Wise people of great wisdom do not intend for their own affliction, for the affliction of others, or for the affliction of both. Rather, wise people think of their own welfare, the welfare of others, the welfare of both self and others, and the welfare of the whole world. It is in this way that a wise person is of great wisdom.”

So these four categories are all working together. Some people are primarily concerned with their own welfare, forget other people. Some people are mostly concerned with the welfare of others. Absolutely forget about yourself, you don't count. And that's a whole orientation that some people have.

Here, the idea was both are important for the Buddha. Buddhism is not a message of being altruistic where you don't count. It's not a message of being selfish where other people don't

count. Both count, both work together. Discover what's really your own welfare in a deep way, your own capacity for peace and happiness. Be concerned for the welfare of others in addition to your own.

And the value of that is that the more you know your own welfare, the more you can understand how to benefit other people and how to support other people in a profound way. And then there's this category concerning the welfare of self and others. I don't know what this meant in the old language, but I like to interpret it to mean we. You and me together. How we come together. The community.

Because it's not just about the individual, but it's also the collective. There's you, there's me, and there's we, as two of us, three of us, ten of us, a thousand of us, that we want to care for that because that's its own entity, its own very significant and important thing to be living in and caring for. And not many people, there's plenty of people who don't understand the we that we live in, that it's almost like its own entity, it's almost like its own significant reference point. The network, the connections, the warmth, the culture, the understandings, the emotions, the care and caring for each other that can go on in the we of this.

And then finally it says, the whole world. I just love that. Care for the whole world. And how I understand this is that no one is meant to be left out of our hearts. That this is not caring just for your own people, your own family, your own community. That everyone is included.

And this is a powerful and challenging idea, because it means that even your enemies, that there's no one who is outside your heart's care for. One of the ways I believe this works is if you understand how peaceful and happy the heart can be, an unconstricted heart and an unclosed heart, that you'll see that as soon as you create people who are not worthy of your care, that their suffering doesn't count, their suffering is not something we're going to care about, we're actually harming ourselves. This peaceful heart has now been contracted and constricted. Something's been left out.

And this is what's hard. How do we include our welfare for people who want to harm us? Aren't we justified in harming them? Aren't we justified in hating them if they hate us? Aren't we justified in defending ourselves and attacking them and killing them if that's what they're doing to us? And I mean, that's a question that everyone has to answer for themselves.

But my understanding from this practice is that, you know, we harm ourselves if we do that. And so this universal call for caring for the whole world requires a very deep inner transformation, a deep understanding and reference point that is remarkable and possible, but that many people haven't touched. And because of that, they live with that arrow in their heart.

And when that arrow is embedded in people's hearts, then rather than pulling out the arrow, sometimes what happens is the arrow gets directed towards other people. And so then we could just continue the endless cycles of violence and harm that goes on in our world.

So another place where this sense of universal care or goodwill comes through in Buddhism is with the Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness, particularly in a particular text called the *Mettā Sutta*, the *Discourse on Loving-Kindness*. And this is a very interesting one because the Buddhist path to peace is kind of paradoxical, that attaining this peace, then we want to care for all people. How do you attain this peace? By caring for all people. And so there's a wonderful paradox that the very goal is the thing about which we practice.

So the *Mettā Sutta*, this is explicit. It says to attain the state of peace, one should find a way to have this wish: may all be happy and safe; may all beings be happy at heart. Again, this universal quality. And what does it take to have this? No one left out. No one you turn your back to. No one you close down to. There might be some people you take a few steps back from, but you don't turn your back.

And this kind of boundless goodwill is not wishful thinking. It means we have to discover something about this peace that the Buddha talked about, that dissolves the arrows of divisiveness, of hostility, of fear that constricts our hearts. There's deep inner work that needs to be done here. And what this loving-kindness discourse says is that just starting to cultivate this care and love and goodwill is one of the ways it begins to dissolve this constricted heart.

And in the *Mettā Sutta*, the way I read it, this is not a passive kind of goodwill, wishful thinking. It includes a clear understanding of the harm caused by deceit, by contempt, by anger and hostility, and a genuine wish toward the ending of these painful states in others. So it goes. This famous discourse says:

“Let no one deceive another or loathe anyone anywhere. Let no one through anger or hostility wish for others to suffer.”

So how is this done? How do we actually not only do this for ourselves, have this universal goodwill, but how do we not let other people deceive each other? How do we support and make it possible for others who don't want to loathe people and harm people? This is difficult work.

So to actually be actively involved in making this change in the world, it requires, I like to say, intelligence, creativity, skillfulness, and discernment about what any given situation needs.

But it requires something that's even harder. And this is where maybe it's so hard that maybe some people are not willing to do this work. It requires that we engage with those who deceive, loathe, and harm without deceiving them in return, without loathing them, and without wishing them suffering.

You see in the world so many places where people hate, and those who are hated hate in return, and it becomes cycles, and people feel justified to hate because after all they're hating me. But someone has to change these cycles. And one of the things is this, don't do the work of helping the world have goodwill for all beings, but do the work without perpetuating the very suffering, the very painful hearts, without continuing to embed the arrow more and more deeply in the heart.

And one way that I like to think of this is that the world suffers so much suffering in this world. Don't add to it. We add to it by hating. We add to it by being caught and constricted by our fear. We add to it by contempt, by our conceit. How do we be present for the suffering of the world and not add more suffering? That's, I think, one of the great kind of challenges and promises that Buddhist practice has for us, is to help us discover what that's like.

So to contribute to a social peace, to the welfare of this whole world, in Buddhism it's not a commandment from outside of us. It's not something you're supposed to do, you have to do it. Rather, it's something that flows naturally when we have honestly reckoned with our own suffering and discovered something of the peace that lies beneath it. A heart freed from the grip of hostility does not need to be told to care for others. It finds that it already does, not as an obligation but as an expression of what it has become. And that peace, extending outward as goodwill, as presence, as the refusal to add more agitation to a world already full of it, is itself a form of peace work. It is as close and as consequential as the next conversation we have, the next conflict we encounter, and the next person whose suffering we are willing to see and care for.

So that's what I did on my vacation. So you've heard some, maybe hopefully some interesting ideas, some interesting orientations and possibilities. It might be nice to take a few minutes to turn towards someone next to you and have a few comments about it or what struck you about what I thought. You don't have to stay. You're not forced to be here. You are also welcome to stay for this maybe five or six, seven minutes that we have the conversation with someone, and just sit quietly.

I love it to see people who just sit there and don't participate in the conversation but stay here sitting meditating, and you get to hear all the chatter. And so maybe if you could turn to maybe one or two people next to you. Make sure that no one's left out. Look around. Make

sure that everyone's included. And then I'll ring a bell in a few minutes and we'll finish up together as a group. So please. Thank you.

So let's come together for the last few minutes. And am I still on? Is this coming up through the speakers? Is it on still? Am I on? Can you hear me? Let's see, can you hear? So, is there a speaker on? Yeah, okay. So, anything, any comments? Anything to bring together this whole conversation into the whole again here, just the whole group? Anything anybody wants to say or ask? Yes?

There we go. I'm going to have my mic there. That's easy.

Thank you so much. Good morning, everyone. I'm Lance, and Gil, thanks for the talk and welcome back. Oops? Can you guys hear me fine? Awesome. So yeah, we had like a small chat here amongst Bess, Kurt, Andrei, and myself.

And what really struck us was the conversation that you mentioned earlier about the balance between our individual needs, the needs of who we're speaking with, and the collective need of perhaps we, collectively we, right, like the world. It seems like there's a common struggle of finding that balance, right? Because sometimes we give and then we forget about ourselves. Sometimes we feel that we need to take. So we were just discussing what are different ways to think about that.

Bess shared that striking that balance may need a broader perspective, that maybe in this particular moment it truly is more about the other person who is in more need. And then in another moment, it might be more about our own selves, right? But as long as perhaps in the grander scheme of things across your life, you're averaging and thinking about the balance of yourself and others, maybe that's perhaps a way to think about it.

And then Kurt also shared, in connecting it to mindfulness, that in that moment where it might be a struggle to find that balance between oneself and others, it's like providing that just few seconds of space of like, hey, what am I needing right now? What is this other person needing right now? What might the world be needing right now? And how can we find a way to honor all those needs together instead of being driven by our fears or anger or whatever other feelings?

Great, great. That was very nice. Thank you for both the questions and your suggestions for a solution. It was very nice. I think it's concur, that it's very situational, the answer. And it's not like simultaneously doing all four categories, but situationally there are times when we absolutely give up any concern for ourselves for someone else who's, you know, who needs to be taken to the ER right away or they'll die. It doesn't matter that you're hungry or you're

going to miss your favorite TV show. You'd happily give it up willingly.

And so it's very situational. And I think also situational for different individuals. Different individuals find themselves located in different situations that call for different things. And some people, whatever their karma, their coincidences of their lives, find themselves in situations that it's natural to emphasize one more than another. But this idea of a pause, this idea of having space, not being in a hurry, the need to be having a heart that stays relaxed and peaceful so it can take in the whole, if you take in the whole of what's happening, you get the evidence of where the need is greatest.

And if you take in the whole, you find out, you know, I'm grumpy and tired and hungry. And yes, I want to help my neighbor who's sick, but I think I'll help the person better if I get some food in me. Otherwise, I'll make it worse. And so this idea of being mindful and really present well to take in the whole, hopefully will get the information we need.

Good morning. I'm wondering about the role of righteous anger, right? The role of righteous anger. And maybe an example that I have in my mind that I made up that I think might be helpful in my orientation is, say I'm going to school every day and every day somebody's stealing my lunch. And eventually I get angry. And it's that anger that serves as my mindfulness bell to say, I need to tell this person to stop, or I need to call a teacher or something. And just for me in my life, I often use that righteous anger as a reminder, kind of like a mindfulness bell that's kind of like, hey, wake up, something needs to be addressed here, something's not working here. Yeah, so I'm curious about that.

Yeah, I think a little bit we have to be careful what we mean by anger. In Buddhism, when we use the word anger, it always implies there's hostility in it. So hostility, there's never a place for hostility. And so if anger always has hostility, there's no place for it. But often in the West, Western culture has this idea of righteous anger or justified anger or something that maybe is an anger that has no hostility in it but has a sense of justice, has a sense of fierceness to it.

And the time in my life where I had the clearest example of this that was directed to me was when I was the kitchen manager in the monastery, which is a kind of pressure cooker difficult place. And I was the manager, so I was telling people what to do and how to do it. And I don't know what, I have no idea what I said anymore. But what I do remember, this person just looked at me and there was this fierceness. At the time I called it white anger to myself because it felt so clean. And he said, "Don't ever say that to me again," but he said it much more dramatically than that. I mean, he got my attention. It was like fierce.

And what was remarkable was as soon as he had said that, and he got this message across, it vanished from him. It was completely gone. And he was ready to be a friend or be available or do the work or whatever. It was quite something. And for me to be the recipient of such clean anger, such clean ferocity, a clear no, to not feel it was sticky or he was stuck in it or it was lingering, that was a real lesson of a way of having maybe something that looks like anger.

So then anger isn't inherently unskillful, it's hostility. Hostility is what we want to be careful of. The hostility is always unskillful. But maybe, and also I don't know, again, I'm confused a little bit myself about the English language here around using the word anger, and do we all have the same reference point for the word when we use it? But maybe if we say fierce. You know, sometimes when they steal your lunch every day, maybe what's needed is a fierce stop. Then it's not so confusing, but saying a fierce anger. So, okay.

So thank you all. So there is a potluck in a few minutes, and please stay if you'd like. And it's a wonderful time to be together, and thank you for being here today.