

Kalama Sutta: To Not Be In Conflict

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We've come to the end of this period, this day of silence, of sitting and walking, and I feel a number of a kind of heartfelt feeling for me to kind of come to the end of the day like this. A lot of different feelings. Some of them are from having met with some of you and talked to some of you about your practice, and some of them are just sitting here. I feel it's important things. I feel a lot of gratitude that we do such things. We come together, and we offer this kind of day to each other, and it's really something we create together, all of us to come together.

And I sat with you as you sat with each other, and you sat with me. And now it was very sweet. I felt, overall, I felt pretty quiet and settled and silent. Today I was surprised. I didn't expect it to be as quiet as it was, and I just felt very nice. I feel very grateful that we do such a thing.

And you know, it's a very simple thing that we do when we do mindfulness practice in daylight today. Sometimes the instructions might sound complicated, or sometimes we make it complicated by our struggles inside, but it's actually an incredibly simple thing. It's simply to be, to be awake to what's happening in the present moment, where the being awake is really the operating word, the release. You know, really awake or really present for the feelings of our breath, the sensations of our breathing, or the sounds in the room, or the sounds around us, or the light, the lighting that goes on, or the steps of our feet as we walk. It can be remarkably simple. It's as simple as feeling the sensations of the next step.

There's nothing we have to figure out or attain or get to, or some great thing is going to happen if we do it just right. All of us know what the sensation is of our feet touching the ground, and it's that simple. You hear the sound of my voice. There's nothing you have to necessarily understand what I'm saying. You don't have to figure, you know, make sense out of it. Just it's the very simple act of perception that here is a sound of a voice that's speaking in a big room like this.

It's that simple as registering and receiving that sound. So it's very simple. And I sense the practice. It's not so easy to do that simplicity, but it's very simple. And I think it's important to stress the simplicity of it and the way that I understood to understand the teachings of the Buddha. He was constantly, in his way, he didn't use the word simple that often, but in his way, I'm stressing the simplicity of he was addressing a very simple message, and he was addressing a very simple practice. And sometimes it's very easy for us to miss the simplicity of what the Buddha was teaching.

I met a monk, and when I was in Thailand, he was a relatively young monk, but he'd been, he was maybe twenty or twenty-one, but he had been in robes. He'd been a novice and been a monk for about ten years. He was ordained as a novice when he was ten or eleven, and so he spent all these years as a monastic. So I asked him, "You know, what have you attained all your years of practice?" And I asked him that because there was something special quality about him, that some being at peace, or some calm, or something that I valued there.

So I asked him, "You know, what is it you attained?" And his answer surprised me. He said, "The main thing I've attained so far in my practice is non-contentiousness." To us, you know, why was that kind of special? You know, I thought that was a kind of odd answer, but I thought it was actually a pretty good answer. It is a pretty good attainment, to be non-contentious.

And so we practice to become non-contentious people, perhaps. But one of the things that we're practicing and one of things the Buddha is, I think, teaching was how not to be in conflict with ourselves and with the world, to be and no longer be in conflict. And I like that, because I like saying it that way. The goal of the practice is to be without conflict. I prefer saying it that way than to say the goal of the practice is to be at peace.

Many people, some people think the goal of practice is to be at peace, or they want peace as the goal, or they think the Buddha is talking about some great peace. The danger with that is that when we reify peace, we think peace is some particular thing, some particular state of being, some particular emotional way of being in the world. But when we say the goal is to not be in conflict, that actually creates some openness, some open possibility that for anything, for a lot of things, once you're not in conflict, is like it's no one. You're peaceful and yet to hold on to the peace. But once you have no conflict, you're full of possibility. And we don't know what's going to fill that space.

And actually, probably the whole realm, a range of ways we can respond and live in the world, can come into that. So not to be in conflict. And most of us, I think, if we study ourselves, if we're mindful of our suffering, most of us will find that our suffering arises out of conflict. We're in conflict with something. We're in conflict with ourselves. We're in conflict with the

world around us.

How we are is not the right way of being. So we're in conflict with that. We think we have to be different. What's happening in the present moment is not the right thing that's supposed to be happening. So we're in conflict with that. The conflict takes many forms.

If it takes the form of judgment, takes the form of aversion, of resistance, it takes the form of want, of fantasizing or dreaming or demanding or something to be different, some form of compulsion often takes it, comes into place. And a Buddhist practice designed to end compulsion, to end compulsive conflict, not to be in conflict anymore. And not to be in conflict doesn't mean that we don't say no. We can still say no to the world, to things. Someone comes and asks for something and demands something of us, and we say no.

One of them, I don't know what to say, ask. Maybe just you take this a little bit as a joke. That's only half serious. One of the great tragedies of American Buddhism is the number of meetings we have to go to. Those of us who are teachers are kind of, I've always found meetings to be very difficult. And so many meetings, my God. And one of the things, you know, you ask, "What? Why I go to meetings?" So simple, isn't it?

Anyway, whatever reason, if we go to meetings a lot, I got a lot of meetings. And one of the things I discovered that made it a lot easier for me to go to meetings is that generally the meetings I go to, the general sense of it is that everybody has to kind of agree before something's decided. It took me a long time to understand the implications of that, but one of the implications of that was that I didn't have to be in conflict with anyone. I didn't have to rush in with my opinion. I didn't have to kind of make sure that I was heard. I didn't have to make sure that I was, you know, that, you know, I rush in and explain my point of view, whatever, or criticize someone else from their point of view.

I could just wait and not say anything, because when it finally came to make a decision, I could say no, and then, "Oh, that's interesting. Gil says no. Why say no?" And then they're interested, and then I tell them. But I didn't have to, you know, rush in with my opinion and kind of, you know, immediately get into a fight about my opinion or my way of seeing things. I could actually not be in conflict and just kind of wait, and sooner or later there's a chance to converse. You know, I don't agree, but I didn't have to do that with a sense of conflict or being in. And I found that tremendously liberating for me.

In these meetings, maybe I was very lucky to be in a context when people are respectful of each other, so that was fun, you know. I wasn't steamrolled over when I said no. But to learn to say no was one of things I had to learn when I lived in Buddhist monasteries. Any kind of

institution kind of has a way of always asking more of us, more and more and more. You can never do enough for an institution, if you've noticed that. So I had to learn to say no. But you can say no without being in conflict.

So to be non-conflict, non-conflicted, doesn't mean we don't say no. So not to be in conflict with ourselves, not to be in conflict with the world, is kind of, in some sense, the goal of the practice. In order to do that, it is necessary to trust ourselves very deeply, to be able to trust ourselves in some way. And I think part of the process of mindfulness is learning to know ourselves well enough so that we can trust ourselves. And trust really comes with knowing ourselves. That's the way trust is discovered. And that's why mindfulness is such a powerful practice. And if we don't trust ourselves, it's very hard to discover this possibility of living life without conflict, living a life that's at ease.

So at some point in his teaching career, the Buddha gave the famous discourse to the Kālāmas, and this is his discourse on how to trust ourselves, and more specifically what we can trust when we trust ourselves. Because the Kālāmas came to the Buddha and said that basically there's a lot of different teachers that come through here. You know, if you go to East West Books in Mountain View and you kind of stay there, you know, for a few weeks, listening to all the teachers that come through, there's a lot of different teachings that go on. And one of the reasonable questions to ask when you hear a lot of different spiritual teachings, and all kinds of different ways to live your life, and different kinds of goals, and different kind of purposes of life, is to ask which of these different teachers, which of these venerable priests and contemplatives are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying. It's pretty good. I thought I kind of these wonderful Kālāmas come to the Buddha and they say, "We hear all the different teachers. How do we know who's true and who's lying?" That's a pretty reasonable question, I think.

Get to the point. The Buddha's response is, "Of course you are uncertain. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born." So I like that because the Buddha says it's okay that you feel doubt. It's okay that you feel uncertainty. Doubt is a fine thing to feel. When there's cause for uncertainty, and when all these different people parade through and give their teachings, and you're uncertain about what's going on, it's reasonable to have doubt. You should have doubts in this case.

If you, in this case, meaning if you can't decide among all these different teachers who is lying and who is true, the Buddha is not going to answer them directly. He's not going to tell them who's lying and who's telling the truth. That's the first interesting thing. He's not going to be contentious. Then I can kind of state his opinion about this and let them be as they are. But

he says, in this case, in the case that you can't decide who is lying, who's telling the truth, in that case, then don't go by reports.

Don't decide what is true or false by reports, by analogies, by agreement with your views, by probability, by inference, by analogies, by agreement with your views, I am repeating myself, or by thought, or because this particular teacher is my teacher, and therefore it must be true. Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, and by the thought, "This teacher is my teacher, therefore it's true." I hope you follow that. Because this particular list of things you shouldn't rely on is what most people rely on in their life. We rely on some traditions, rely on scripture. The scripture is true, therefore it must be true.

Some people rely on the fact that the teacher says so. Very nice if I could just say whatever I want and you believe me. It'd be very efficient. But it would be disastrous. I don't want you to believe me just because I say so. We agree with things because it agrees with our views. And this is actually extremely common in life, that we have certain views and certain preferences, certain ways we think it should be because it's nice that way, and then, oh, we agree with it.

Whatever it is that bolsters and supports our particular opinion. And so opinions change over time, and so then the people we can hang out with changes because we want to hang out with people who agree with our opinion. By inference or by intuition. Many of us rely on our intuitive sense of what is right and wrong, and I think it's very challenging to us that the Buddha says, "Don't go by inference. Don't go by intuition," because many of us that's what really we rely on, some intuitive sense of knowing. And the Buddha says, actually, maybe that's not really reliable, our intuitive sense.

In one place in the scriptures, the Buddha actually also criticizes relying too quickly on what we can know from meditation. Some people say, "Well, the meditative knowing, what we can really learn from meditation, that really teaches what is true and what is false." And the Buddha said, you know, actually that's not even necessarily the case either. Sometimes this particular list in English is translated as by our reasoning. Here it says logical conjecture. And here in the West we put a tremendous amount of value on our reasoning, and that we can reason our way to the truth. And the Buddha actually says, is actually kind of skeptical about that, actually suggests, "Don't do that that way."

Such a little bit of a funny thing here, because here the Buddha is saying, "Don't go by all these things." And who is he to tell us? You know, he's just another one of these teachers coming through, and he says at the end of it, "Don't say because a teacher says so." But here he's a teacher telling you what you should do and shouldn't do. So it's kind of tricky. It's

kind of like a Möbius strip. You can't get out of a trap. But I think it's very interesting that the Buddha says, "Don't go by the fact that it's traditional to believe this. It's been my tradition, by my family tradition, my religious tradition, for generations and generations. It must be true because it's traditional." The Buddha says, "Don't rely on that," because traditions aren't necessarily true either. Our reasoning isn't necessarily truthful.

What I find when people come to a tradition like Buddhism, Buddhist practice here in the West, and kind of here in Palo Alto, California, is that many people have an interest in things spiritual, and they're looking around for some kind of spiritual practice, and Buddhism somehow fits into the subcategory of spiritual practices, and so they're interested in that also. But spirituality is a very vague word, the word spiritual. I actually went through this week and looked through all the different books I could find on mindfulness practice in English to see how much the teachers use the word spiritual. It is very revealing. Some teachers used it a lot, and some teachers didn't use it at all.

But one of the interesting trends was that in the books in English twenty years ago the word was never used, almost three times. We're always getting used more and more, even by the teachers who twenty years ago didn't use it at all. I'm now using it more. So this word spiritual is used a lot, but it's very vague what it means. And different traditions have different references for what it means. And for some people, it means to really find the true self. For some people, it means to find our true connection with the universe or with the essence of the universe.

For some people, the spirit, what's spiritual is that which, well, I may ask you what it is to you, some years say definitions of what spirituality is, some of the definitions you've heard, if you don't admit your own. What is spirituality defined, or what does it mean? What's the, what are things to be included in it? Yes, spirituality is to be in awe of something greater than yourself. And so that's a common one. The idea of wanting to have some relationship to something that's larger than oneself, to surrender the small self or this thing that's larger than ourselves.

Some people say, "But, okay, I understood the logical mind for spirituality." So those things which can't be understood by the logical mind belong to the world of spirituality. And okay, so it used to be a lot more things were spiritual than they are now, because we understand more things than we used to. What else? Maybe yes, the search for the meaning of life. Good, okay. So the philosophical quest for meaning is sometimes a spiritual quest for some people. What else have you heard? What else? Ideas from your friends maybe, what they think spirituality is.

How much the traditional meaning of it, spirit, has to do with that which has to do with a spirit, the spiritual. Does that have to? Now, back a hundred years ago, the word spirituality, I think, mostly referred to spiritualists who, you know, connected with the spiritual world through channeling or through whatever way they had. And that sense of spirituality isn't so strong in our particular circles, but you still find in some parts of our country, of our culture, that spirituality primarily means channeling or connecting to spiritual beings, connecting to spiritual beings of all kinds. Having a spiritual connection to God is a spiritual thing.

So this is not generating a lot of examples here. You guys are at the end of a day. But yes, spirit. Oh, that's common, aren't you? In that sense, sometimes spirituality is considered to be very personal. Spirituality is something of your personal experience, your personal feeling that a person might have. Yes, for me, or I do listen, what I'm having to that is a case of it's an all-encompassing sense of who we are, good and bad. This is your definition of spirituality.

What I'm trying to get at, which hopefully is a reasonable thing to do, is to try to point out that the word spiritual has many different references and meanings in our culture. And if two people are talking using the word spiritual, they aren't necessarily talking about the same thing. Even though they're both nodding their heads, they think they're talking about the same thing. But they could be talking, one person can be talking about the spiritual being, you know, that person. "He met someone who is really spiritual." "Oh, I'd like to meet that person," you know. And that person could be in great awe of the mystery.

Or that person simply means that person has, you know, really accepted their dark and the light sides. We are maybe two different things. Or somewhat, that person means they have a very direct connection with some spiritual being, some disembodied spirit, and that's what makes them spiritual. There's many things, many things that the word spiritual can refer to. If you're following me, and basically kind of you don't not agree with me, but anyway, you're following me, what I'm trying to say. When people come to Buddhist practice, they bring with them a lot of their understanding.

If they want Buddhism to be their spiritual practice, they bring with them a lot of their ideas what spirituality is, and they want Buddhism to do the same, to meet that, to satisfy that. And so they bring a lot of ideas, a lot of ideas, a lot of complicated ideas, a lot of baggage to their understanding of Buddhist practice. They want it to be a spiritual practice. And perhaps Buddhism is not a spiritual practice at all. And I say that as a challenge to you, because many of us want it to be a spiritual practice. Maybe it's not a spiritual practice.

Then you ask, "What is it?" I'm not going to like it to be a religious practice, that's for sure. So no way, you know. So what is it? Well, some people say it's a way of life, but that doesn't

mean much at all. Some people say, "Well, it's a philosophy." Most of us aren't interested in philosophies per se. You know, you can go to Stanford and study philosophy. It doesn't help your life much.

Some people won't want to call it a therapy. But, you know, there's a lot of Buddhists who get kind of uncomfortable reducing it just to the idea of a therapy. You know, it's therapy, that's all. So what is it? We want it to be something. Well, maybe we don't have to make it anything. We can be in awe of what it is. Buddhist practice doesn't have to be anything.

So the Buddha went on talking to the Kālāmas. Don't go by all these things, by tradition, by inference, by reports, by inference, by intuition, by reasoning. Now, this is all fine for spiritual teachings, but what's interesting also to me is a lot of us, a lot of the suffering a lot of us live under comes from having taken something, some belief, as being authoritatively true. So, for example, the belief that I am unworthy. We believe it on what authority do we believe it? On tradition, on reports, on hearsay, on intuition, on reasoning.

Because someone has told us that. When I was told in eighth grade that I had no artistic ability, and I went for the next ten years of my life believing that that's the way the world was made up. It was only because of the authority of my eighth-grade art teacher who told me that. Can you believe someone telling you that in eighth grade? But so I went with that authority. We pick up a lot of things from our environment, from our culture, from our experiences in life, and we reason on that. We base some conclusions about ourselves on that.

Whenever we never ask, "On what authority is this true?" On what authority is it true that it's wrong for me to feel depressed? On what authority do I take it, I believe that it's wrong or bad for me to feel joy? There was someone here today, we talked about that here, because of her background, a religious background, it's considered to be, she had this wonderful Catholic word for it: concupiscence. The word concupiscence. Someone knows, am I Catholic here? Concupiscence. She described as meaning you can't go outside and enjoy the sun because you can't enjoy the warmth of the sun. That was a kind of a sin.

I don't know that's true in Catholicism, but that's her understanding, what she picked up. So some people, they've learned something that receives feeling joy is based on some authority: joy is not an appropriate thing to feel. So it isn't just simply the authority of our teachers or our teachings. But it's also to really question deeply why we believe what we believe. Well, on what authority do we believe the deepest things we believe about ourselves and then suffer because of it?

So the Buddha went on and said, well, he didn't just simply say what you shouldn't believe,

what authority you shouldn't just take blindly. Then he went on to offer the Kālāmas teaching: when you know for yourselves. And that's the key thing, when you know for yourselves. And that gets a lot of people's attention, because most of us in Western Buddhism want to have a practice where we can know for ourselves. We don't want to trust anything but what we can know for ourselves. But then the question is, I ask you again, what can you reliably know for yourselves?

So I have to help her with this talk. I assume I have had intuitive hits that have been wrong. I have actually made mistakes based on my intuition. And then you can say, "God, argue that wasn't your true intuition. If you really can, really and really and really in touch with yourself, you really know." Well, how do I know that? I thought I was. So experimenting in an open way, experimenting, trial and error, that's pretty good, okay. What that would be? Inference, maybe.

But if I like to eat a lot, and I overeat, and I get sick, I've learned something. So I don't care. I think maybe I've learned something here about eating. What happens to me? I get really tired after lunch if I eat a big lunch. Maybe I've learned something. That's something that I know for myself now.

Do I really know it only if I don't experiment at one time? Tell me, do it again. Well, don't eat it twice. I won't really, you know. At some point, you have to come to the conclusion, this is pretty reasonable. What else can we know for ourselves? What are some of things? What are some of the ways that you rely on? What are some things that you think you can really know for yourself? How you feel, that's good.

What else? Maybe mistaken by, sorry, you would be mistaken about it. Oh, I'm not sure that I, or the brain. No, as in the obvious way. It's almost only to what you can know. What I didn't know, no whether or what I was delusion, not so. Then there's no spiritual path. There's no path for you. Then a practice, for some reason, is as bad as I could be pursuing it. So you just stumbled onto this, and because of your lack of imagination, this is where you're staying. Hahahahaha.

So what I like to challenge you with, Marty, is that unless there's something you can know, there's no path, there's no practice for you, and you're wasting your time. So the question is, what can you know? What can you reliably know? Yes, great. So it's a very basic, organic kind of knowing. This is, "I'm alive." That's, please. He was talking to a group of people who came and talked to him, and he was just talking. He wasn't talking philosophically or about the true self or something. He was just kind of talking generally. "You guys can know for yourselves," you know. It makes sense.

So I hadn't finished a sentence, but he said, "When you know for yourselves that..." And then I stopped and said, what is it you can know for yourselves? Some people will say, "I can know my true self. I really know who I am." That's what some people have a lot of confidence in and say, "This is what I know." Some people will say, "I really know about God or some divine. I really, really know that for myself. This is what I know." There's a lot of things people make claims about that they can really know for themselves. And those, I think, you know, I think we should always study why we know something. On what basis do we know, and what authority we know it? I think it's in fact very, very liberating to do that.

So this is what the Buddha had to say:

When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskillful, these qualities, these states of mind, these activities of mind, of heart, are blameworthy, that these qualities are criticized by the wise, these qualities, these states, when undertaken and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering, then you should abandon them.

And then he went on to say a little later: when you know for yourselves, these qualities are skillful, these qualities are blameless, these qualities are praised by the wise, these qualities, when undertaken and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness, then you should enter and remain in them.

And the operating thing for me here is when you know for yourself that these lead to harm and to suffering, and when you know for yourself that this leads to welfare and to happiness. The premise of the Buddha is that you can know for yourself the experience of suffering, and you can know for yourself that which creates that suffering and that which leads to happiness. You can experience happiness, you can experience peace, you can experience suffering, and you can really know that for yourself. And there might be other things you could know, but this is what the Buddha was concerned about in the practice he was offering.

The Buddha once went in the forest with some of his students, and he picked up a bunch of leaves. And he said, "What do you think is greater, the amount of leaves in my hand or the number of leaves in the forest?" And the students said, "You know, gee, Buddha, it's pretty obvious there's lots more leaves in the forest than are in your hand." And then he said, "In the same way, what I know, what I teach you, versus what I know, is like the leaves in my hand versus the leaves in the forest," meaning he knows a lot more than what he's teaching. And I think the reason for that is he's teaching, the Buddha taught something very particular and very simple.

And, in a sense, very narrow, so narrow that maybe some people who are interested in spir-

ituality will find it too narrow for them. What the Buddha was teaching, he said over and over again, he said, "What I teach is one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering." The practice that he was teaching was based on what you can really experience and know for yourselves without any doubt. And what we can really know for ourselves is that we suffer and it's possible not to suffer. We can not suffer. We can not add suffering to our life. We can know our conflict, we can know that we're in conflict, and we can know we can end the conflict. And it's very simple.

So one of things we study in mindful practice is our suffering. We get interested in it, not to be morbid, not to get depressed necessarily, but so we can become happier and become free of it. Because if we don't understand how we suffer, it's very hard realistically to become free of those forces of suffering, those forces of conflict within us, the forces of compulsion and attachment that exist at the moment. Another way of talking about all this is, which the monk Ajahn Sucitto, or analogy he told me recently, is if you're a nature photographer, and you wanted to go to the plains north of Africa, or the kind of Kenya where they have all these game and all these wild animals, and you want to get a photograph of all the different animals that exist there, you'd spend a lot of time, maybe waste a lot of time, if you went driving around looking for all the animals and trying to find each of them, take a picture of each of them. It just, you know, takes too much work.

Rather, what you do is you go to the waterhole, and you set up your camera at the waterhole, and you wait for the animals to come to you, and you can just kind of take it easy, just relax, wait till they come, and you take a picture. So all the animals have to come to the waterhole eventually. It's kind of like that with our practice. As we sit in the present moment, and we pay attention to what comes to us in the present moment, but in particular, we pay attention to our discomfort, or places where we're uncomfortable, places we suffer, places where we feel tight or stressed, because whatever we need to learn about freedom can be discovered through going into that and discovering the forces of compulsive attachment and clinging and resistance and fear that exist there.

So the Buddha's path may be not a spiritual path, but the Buddha's path is a very narrow path, focusing on a very narrow issue of our life that maybe is not even going to tell us the meaning of life, is not necessarily going to tell us a lot of things we can learn about life, is not necessarily going to tell us great spiritual truths about gods and goddesses and spiritual beings or whatever. But it is going to teach us how to live a life that's not in conflict, that's not going to suffer, that's going to be at peace, if I still can allow to use that word. And that is a phenomenal thing, not to be in conflict, not to be in resistance or in fear with life as it is. It's

such a phenomenal thing to experience that the English word grace probably characterizes it the best. It's a state of being in grace.

But we can't say it in Buddhism, because usually grace means something we receive from, you know, whatever, just a way of being. So in this practice, we study our suffering, we are interested in it, and what we try to do is to find a way to accept life as it is, to accept ourselves as it is, rather than be in conflict with what is. And there's a world of difference between being in conflict with what is versus accepting what is. Acceptance, in Buddhist terminology, is not approving something. It's neither approving nor rejecting. It's, in a sense, allowing things to be there without us having a compulsive relationship to it. And a compulsive relationship is a compulsive desire or compulsive aversion or compulsive fear.

Life presents itself. We sit at the waterhole of life and all the different animals of life come to us. It's phenomenal what'll come to us as we go through life. Terrible tragedy, tremendous challenges, tremendous illnesses can occur, tremendous loss, tremendous joys and delights can happen. These things just happen in our life. A lot of stuff happens as we go through life. Buddhist practice is not a protection from any of that.

If you are mindful, you can be less accident-prone. That's nice, but you know, so maybe you will have less accidents than other people would have overall, maybe. But Buddhist practice doesn't protect you from all the things that can happen in human life. What Buddhist practice protects you from is how we ourselves contribute to our suffering. How we ourselves react and respond is where our suffering gets created, the suffering that we add to the situation, the optional suffering in any given event.

So if we find ourselves in some tragedy, we find ourselves in a hospital, and our life is turned upside down from one day to the next because of the accident, there's a lot of reactions we might have to that. There's reactions of anger, of resistance. There's reactions of denial. A person might go into fantasy for ten days because they don't want to deal with it, just fantasize about something else. There can be self-pity. There's all these things we add to it.

And the question we ask in the practice is, is our reaction to the event that's happened, is it required? Does the event itself require that kind of response? One of the maybe simple ways of learning this lesson is around physical pain, discomfort, when we sit in meditation. Most of us will feel some discomfort in our body as we sit and meditate, unless we are constantly changing our posture to avoid it. But if you sit still, sooner or later you'll come to some kind of discomfort.

One of the great lessons to be had with physical discomfort is to see the difference between

physical discomfort and our relationship to the discomfort. We feel pain in the knee, and then we feel anger towards it, or we feel aversion towards it, or we feel self-pity because we have it, or we judge ourselves. You know, this other person sitting next to me, she hasn't moved in three days, you know. She's just sitting there with tremendous joy and bliss, and there's something spiritually wrong with me because I'm feeling physical pain. If only the pain wasn't there, then I could really kind of, you know, get it, you know?

So we have all these valuations and judgments and ideas that we add on top of the simple experience of pain. It's possible to let pain be pain, and not to make anything of it, not to react to it, not to judge it, not to hate it. Physical pain maybe isn't one of the great places to see this. It's one of the great values of staying with your pain a bit longer than maybe you normally would, is to start separating out your reactions to it from the experience itself.

You know, I was a little bit self-conscious in the beginning of the day about the soccer sounds, all the yelling, which was rather minor today compared to what it has been. And partly I say it because I'm concerned about some people being upset. There are some people who hear the soccer sounds and they think it's lovely, and some people who hear the soccer sounds get all upset. "How could I have chosen the meditation hall where there is this noise? These bumbling fools who don't know about meditation, you know, they choose a noisy place." The response and the reaction is varied from person to person, but the response is optional. It's just sounds. The sound doesn't require a judgment.

The really terrible things happen to us in our life. What we try to do in the meditation practice is to try to understand: where is it that I add? What is it that I do? What are the qualities, the unskillful qualities, that I add to the soup that creates more contraction, more tightness, more aversion, more suffering, and more hurt to the situation? And if we can start, if we can know that, we can know for ourselves what creates pain, what creates suffering, what doesn't, then we have the opportunity to, in small maybe increments, to begin moving in the direction of not being in conflict with the situation, to allow things to be as they are, to allow ourselves to have a broken heart when our heart is broken, not needing it to be any different, not to add judgment or aversion or interpretation or meaning on top of it, just to let our heart be broken.

Or we feel great joy and delight, to allow it to be there without being afraid that it's going to disappear, or be upset that it disappears, or try to plan every possible way to hold on to it and in the planning of it lose touch with it, just to let joy be joy in a simple way, or let tragedy be tragedy. We can't necessarily trust everything the mind conjures up. One of the great liberating realizations I had in my practice was to realize I didn't have to believe all my

thoughts. How liberating! I don't know where I got the idea growing up that every thought was true. But when I was younger, I just thought that every possible thought I had had to be true because I thought it. Why?

So when I realized I didn't have to believe my thoughts, I was much more relaxed around life. But what we're to trust, myself, to trust ourselves, is to trust that we can know for ourselves how our reactions, what our reactions are, what our responses are, what's going on for us inside ourselves, what our feelings are, and then to know for ourselves. We begin to know for ourselves, not necessarily we know it immediately, but as we begin to bring more mindfulness, to know for ourselves our different responses and reactions, to know the difference between a reaction and a response that's tight and conflicted with its situation, and a response which is open-handed, open-hearted to the situation. We find ourselves in all kinds of situations which are difficult. It's hard to be a human being, but can we simply let it be without being in conflict? Can we, in a sense, be at peace with whatever is happening?

That is a very narrow domain of Buddhist practice, that the essential point of Buddhist practice are the things that are auxiliary, that's added as part of it, that are wonderful parts of it. But the essential point of Buddhism is that narrow. How does that sound to you? Is that too narrow, too not enough? You want it to be more. And in the end, we learn not to be in conflict.

What I find in myself and many of the people I talk with in living here in this part of the country is that there is a certain kind of discomfort with the teaching, the practice of letting go. What people don't notice is many of us are constantly letting go of our ease, constantly letting go of our state of non-conflict, of our peace. We're constantly letting go of our well-being by our judgments and values, by our busyness, by wanting more and more things, by wanting this and that, by giving in unconsciously to our minor irritations and judgments and hurries, being in a hurry, our fear of what other people think of us. We're constantly giving up, giving something away, by getting caught up compulsively with all those things. We are experts at giving away, at giving up, letting go, but we let go of the wrong things.

To take Buddhist practice seriously is to take seriously the possibility that it's possible to live a life that doesn't have any conflict in it. You don't have to believe it's possible. You don't have to take it as an absolute necessity. But to really take it seriously, it's possible to move in that direction. And to take it seriously, it takes seriously enough that that becomes a higher priority than having an infinite number of recreational opportunities, or having, you know, a high-paid job, or having our boss's approval, or having, you know, someone else's approval, or to have enough, to have the right kind of car or expensive car. There's always ways in

which other priorities get us on, acting compulsively and faster, and doing things and doing things and doing things.

And to take Buddhist practice seriously is to make a very high priority the possibility of living a life which is not in conflict, and then studying how that can be done. Now, you don't have to do that. I don't care too much whether people take this very seriously. I'm just saying that someone today in your interviews felt that I'm about, I'm some kind of saying it wrong now, I think I'm stretching, which may be what was talked about, but that we don't talk as Buddhist teachers, we don't talk enough about the options that are available to us as practitioners. We just kind of offer a practice. We don't talk about all the options. So that's why I'm saying this.

One of the options, if you're interested enough, if you're serious enough about it, is to find a life which is not in conflict. And that is a phenomenally beautiful thing to do. And it's one of the most beautiful gifts that you can give to your society around you. You stand up being a person who is not in conflict. So I hope that was okay to talk this way. Maybe it was kind of maybe preaching too much, but I offer this talk as a challenge on many different fronts. I challenge you in your ideas about spirituality, your ideas about what you can really know for yourself, and your ideas about what you think Buddhist practice is and where the real work is of Buddhist practice.

Any important questions before we ended?

I wonder, yes, when the statement about the number of leaves in time to Buddhists are very narrow, do you think he would say that it's not necessary, and that it's not necessary to have the also words? Or in saying that, he followed this narrow path understood, too. I don't know that answer, but I suspect that it's a lot of things in life that I'm never going to know, but I don't have to know them in order to be at peace. And actually, in terms of what we often call spiritual, in the Buddha's time, they believed in, or they knew, I don't know what, deities, all these deities that exist up in the heavenly realms. There were some people who became liberated, and through the particular kind of practice they had, could know about those realms. And there were other people who became liberated who never knew about those realms. Liberation was not dependent upon knowing about those realms.

That is more interesting, become liberated, isn't it? Some people are more interested in knowing all kinds of wonderful things. But why are we more interested in knowing those things? That's the interesting question. Why are we, for example, the question of meaning, that some people, somebody says that to be spiritual is to be interested in the meaning of life. I propose to you, and this is my opinion, that Buddhism doesn't offer anyone the meaning

of life. Buddhism, rather than offering the meaning of life, what Buddhism offers is a challenge to you to understand why you want, why your interest in the meaning of life, what's the motivation for it.

If we go, because some people are anxiously concerned about the meaning of life. But if you go back and turn the mirror back, and why is it you want to know the meaning of life, and you deal with that anxiety, and you no longer have the anxiety, and you're at peace, then what happens to the need to know about the meaning? It's fine to search for meaning. It's fine, maybe even find it. But do we have to search for meaning at the expense of being, at the expense of losing our peace? And the Buddha, I believe, would say no, you don't have to miss what his teaching is. You don't have to lose your peace in the search for meaning. And perhaps more important than finding the meaning of life is finding your peace. Anyway, that's what you decide.

Yes, please. I'm only over here in aversion. I got here, I thought, "This sweet..." and I started onto that. And so then I thought, "Well, I'm sorry that I experienced it that way. Am I conjuring that now?" The space and good attention I have here, then I can discover. That technique is to bring your experience of suffering in the past, or in this recent past. If you let go of space now, when you're in it, it's hard to have that insight in it.

Certainly I myself generally don't, as a generalization, generally I don't recommend that kind of way of practicing. I would rather keep cultivating mindfulness in the present moment and then bring that mindfulness with you into life. And then when those things come up, you are ready to pay attention in the moment. I don't look for trouble. I mean, don't create trouble when it's not there. But cultivate your mind, strengthen it, so that when trouble comes you are ready to study it when it does come. But occasionally I think it can be very useful to do what you did if it's something really troubling you and it's a recurrent theme and happening a lot.

Anger keeps coming up, and in your normal life your mind is just a little too busy to really pay attention to it. It can be very valuable to use a place of great calm and stability, and then to kind of bring it up and look at it then and see it in a new way. So it can be very useful. It has its place.

Yes, Nancy, it's on. You use the word suffer, and in some way that we do ourselves to suffer in that. It sounds like, and I've found it more useful to see absent was just the little ways in which, you know, one morning I woke up before the alarm. Later I can go back to sleep, but then there I am wholly being asleep and doing a work on. We stop right there. So it's useful to be lots and lots. And yes, I think so.

It's actually very important what you said. Some of us are very eager to practice with the big things, and are completely oblivious to paying any attention to the small discomforts and small sufferings, and we're interested in whatever happens. And actually, it might for some of us not be more important and more useful to pay careful attention to the small things, because you have much more options there, rather than the big things which are so overwhelming. Pay attention to the small ways in daily life in which you can tighten and contract and get fearful or whatever, and then begin to soften those up. And then, if that becomes, it becomes the strength that you have, the strength of not having the small kind of irritations.

You know, for example, don't get irritated next time you go on Highway 101. Make that a practice. If you can discover how not to get upset or not to suffer driving on Highway 101, which is a relatively small thing, that I think actually is very significant, and that'll serve you really well in bigger issues. So I think it's very well what you said, very important. Many of us are too tolerant of our small sufferings. We don't pay attention to it.

And in doing all this, you know, what I'm saying, in a sense, is another way of talking about all this is this practice is a practice of tremendous generosity, tremendous allowing, of allowing ourselves to be as we are. And the spirit of this practice, the spirit is really a spirit of tremendous compassionate generosity, allowing ourselves fully who we are, and accepting ourselves and forgiving ourselves for who we are as we are. To do that really thoroughly is to begin to soften all the places where we're in conflict with ourselves, because conflict is non-acceptance. So it's really beautiful.

I love this practice, and I loved coming here today, and just the way it felt, kind of sweetness coming in here. I feel generally, when I am sitting with all of you and sitting here, I feel that this room and this space that we create can hold anything. Anything that we are, anything we bring, can be held in it. And I think it's a little bit rare in our society to come into a space, into a place where anything that we bring is okay. Any part, any way we are, is okay. And we can just situate it mindfully.

So things have to end, too. And we've got almost twenty minutes over in this timeless world. We've gone twenty minutes over. This is a wonderful thing. People sometimes, when the practice gets on, when people really don't suffer anymore, when people don't add clinging or compulsion, this grace that I talked about is sometimes described in the Buddhist tradition as an experience of a timeless present. And the paradox is, a person can say, "At eighteen minutes after five on Saturday afternoon, I experienced the timeless."

So may you all be at peace, be without conflict. May whatever benefit we've had from this day of practice together be for our own experience of non-conflict, and so that other people

we encounter in the world can also discover the joy of not being conflicted. May all beings be without conflict. Thank you.