

Thursday Dharma talk

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So, this Dharma practice that we do, especially on the retreat, is a very profound way to become the caretaker of your inner life. Sometimes in Buddhism they might subsume the inner life under the word *citta*, but become the caretaker for it. And I kind of, a little bit, staked my life on the idea that if we do it ourselves and support other people to care for their inner life, that'll spread out into the world to benefit the world around us.

For one thing, to really know what's possible in the inner life—the inner freedom, the inner well-being, happiness, the inner peace—we're in such a better place to understand how to care for others, what's important for others. Not that other ways of caring for people aren't important; they are. But some of us, some people in the world, should know how deeply and fully we can bring health, profound health, to our hearts, our inner life. That is kind of a foreign concept in much of most societies. Partly because people are usually kind of distracted from really knowing their inner life well. Sometimes so distracted, so preoccupied, so lost that people take advantage of them.

But to become the caretaker, the protector of our own inner life, the primary way we begin doing that is becoming aware. The two, as far as I could tell, in the earliest Buddhist texts, the most significant verbs that are used are the verbs knowing and seeing: to know and see for oneself, and in some deep, deep way. And I haven't said too much about seeing or observing, but certainly knowing has come up a lot here already. We have all these faculties for attention, for attending to the world and being in touch with the world, in touch with ourselves.

And in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the most common verb for doing so is to know. There's also the idea of feeling, experiencing, sensing, and others. And when we get to the second foundation of mindfulness, we're presented with a distinction between some aspect of our inner life which is deep within us and some aspect of our inner life which is on the surface. And

many people live their life on the surface. Here, when the Buddha makes this distinction, I think he's compassionately showing us, pointing us to some fuller, deeper, intimate part of our inner life that only we can be the caretaker of.

We certainly don't want to contract out for someone else to be the caretaker for our inner life, though I suppose some people do that. They're kind of depending on someone else to make them happy, uplifted, inspired, to make them feel valuable and worthy, lovable. It turns out it is much more fragile if that comes from outside. It's possible for all those to be born from within: to value ourselves, to love ourselves, to care for ourselves, to inspire ourselves, to provide meaning from this deep place within.

So this process is waking up and strengthening, or learning to recognize better, how we attend, how we're aware. And the wonderful kind of way this works is that the very thing that we're using to look, to understand, to know, to see—that whole capacity to be aware—is itself the center, the heart, of our inner life. To care for inner life by knowing it, we're using some of the most important part of the inner life to know itself.

So it's not exactly like learning to see so that we can have a better relationship with the thing we see. We're learning to see so we can appreciate how wonderful, meaningful it is to see, to know, to feel, to sense, to understand, to sense. And so, kind of, the very practice we do is partly the reason we practice. So that there's this wonderful feedback loop, or feedback support, that the very thing we're looking for is found in the looking itself. It's right there, right there: knowing and seeing.

As I said, knowing and seeing are the most common verbs the Buddha uses. And he uses them, in some places, very explicitly, saying, “I know,” “I see.” In places where the other religions of India at that time were making absolute claims about the existence of things, they would say there is an enduring soul-like self. Or some of the Buddhist texts depict some of the gods saying, “I exist. Forever, I'm eternal.” Hopefully, that's nice for them.

But the Buddha never says that kind of language. He doesn't use the language that this is who I am, this is what really exists. What he falls back on over and over again is, “This is what I know. This is what I see.” That's the key, and that's something that we all share. We can all do it. We can know and see.

And so, part of what we're doing in *Satipaṭṭhāna* is beginning to see better and more clearly. That involves beginning to see distinctions, to see that things aren't one big mass of suffering, aren't just a big mass of self, one swirling mess. But there's all these parts that are in play, and to see the different parts for what they are is extremely helpful. And it's helpful

because, without doing that, the knowing, the seeing, can collapse into what is known and seen. There's no difference.

We know through the filter of a belief, and so what we know becomes the same as that belief. So if you believe that you are defined by your comfort and discomfort, and you're seeing and looking and knowing through the filter of, "I, who I am, depends on my comfort and discomfort," then you see the comfort and discomfort. Already, along with the seeing, is the very idea that there's a self there, and you can't really see it.

It's all different pieces. There's discomfort or comfort. There's a belief of what it means to be a self. There's a knowing of the comfort. There's a knowing of the belief, and they're all distinct. We don't have to have them collapse into each other and then seem like one big mess, one big mass, one big solid thing. This is the truth, and so we're beginning to see more and more clearly and, in the clarity, discovering freedom.

Seeing, "Oh, look, there's this, and there's a knowing of it." And so, one of the big distinctions is between sensing the feeling sensations and knowing what it is. Those are two different functions, attentional functions. If we insist on not separating them, then they start to kind of glue together, and we don't start seeing clearly anymore. And it's easier to see things as being permanent, fixed: this is how it is. Then it's easier to lop a self onto it.

But if you see how there's a sensation, it's warm, and maybe that's uncomfortable, then there's the knowing of it. But wait a minute, the knowing is not hot. Is it cold? Well, it's neither hot nor cold. But does it have the discomfort of the heat? Well, the knowing doesn't have the discomfort of the heat.

Well, where are you going to rest your attention? I think the obvious thing to do is to go find the discomfort. That's the most prominent thing that you need to do: look for the most discomfort you can find and spend time there, as much time as you can. But if the knowing and the sensing are one and the same, then there's no alternative, and then you don't have to choose. You can just be uncomfortable as much as you want.

But if you see clearly the sensing and the knowing are two different things, you have a little bit more choice, or there's a little bit more space. And this thing about space between things, because they're distinct rather than being glued together, is a very important part of this process. And what the *Vipassanā* tradition emphasizes a lot is the idea that if knowing and sensing have collapsed into each other—the idea of what it is and the sensations that that idea is naming, if they're one and the same thing—then it's much harder to see the thing you're looking at or feeling as being impermanent, inconstant, or changing.

Because ideas tend to have a kind of Platonic continuity. They're kind of like more real or solid, but in direct experience, they're not. But if the sensations and the knowing, or the seeing and the knowing, have collapsed, it's harder to see things as being in change. But if you can see it as two separate things, then you're more likely to see clearly that things are changing.

The sensations are changing all the time, even if it's just a little dance of different sensations in a particular millimeter in your knee. It's sparking back and forth, coming and going. And also, it's easier to see that the knowing itself is changing; it comes and goes. And part of the value of dropping into the deep mind, as opposed to the shallow mind, deep feelings rather than the shallow feelings, is that the shallow feelings lend themselves to be much more closely integrated into the reactive operating system. It's much easier to get caught up and reactive, and to not see the details, but just see through the filter of the general concepts, ideas, right and wrong, and me and you, and things like that.

But the deep operating system—that's where the quality of our inner life is mostly found. But it's also where we have a chance to settle and begin seeing with more clarity. And over time, the clarity becomes more and more clear: the clarity of awareness. And so, at some point in this practice, it's almost as if, or it is as if, awareness becomes its own entity. Not its own person, but just as a thing.

Wow, just like your hand is its own entity, kind of. It's a thing, your hand, if you have one. And in the same way, you have awareness, and it's like, "Wow, this is like a real thing." That's usually lost on people because usually awareness has collapsed into what we're aware of, lost in what we're aware of. So we don't appreciate the fact that we're aware.

And what we have the opportunity to do in retreat is to appreciate that we're aware. And for me, I spend more time on retreat than elsewhere being amazed that I'm aware. Like, wow, I'm amazed. And all the flow of knowing that goes on in my mind that I didn't invite, that I didn't plan, that I maybe wasn't even expecting. It's just like, wow, that's not me exactly, but it's not not me. It's just this knowing things.

I mean, very mundane things. Where I'm staying, in the house over there in the living room, it's not cluttered, but right now there's a lot of things: chairs and recliner and sofa and little coffee table. And the space between them is not very wide. I walk back and forth because I have to go on the deck to talk to you, and I'm just amazed. Different days I take a different route, but to the left of the coffee table, to the right, something in me knows how to turn, what to avoid, how not to bump into things.

I mean, there's a whole processing going on in my mind, and I just delight in kind of just watching. Wow, there's a lot of knowing here. And guess what? It's free. And there's a kind of knowing that that knowing is not really using any energy. It seems to be. There's no stress in some of this knowing.

At least right now, I'm still young enough to walk through it. It's no stress. Maybe in 20 years it'll be more challenging. But I'm kind of amazed to know, to sense, to all these things. And as the mind quiets down, as the mind is not so wed to its thoughts, caught in its thoughts, or collapsed into its thoughts, and there's more clarity of seeing, then the clarity becomes a thing.

And in the description of the fourth *jhāna* yesterday, whereas in the first *jhānas* it's the joy and the happiness that is like water that saturates, permeates a person—the whole body, all the whole body, is touched. No part of the body is not touched by the happiness of the first three *jhānas*. But in the fourth *jhāna*, it's no longer the happiness. Rather, no part of the body is not touched with the pure, clean mind, the pure, clean functioning of the mind.

And the way to get to that is to know, to sense, to be aware, to watch, to see what's happening here moment by moment. That seeing and knowing is not collapsing into the experience that we know. It is not reacting to what we know. It is not pulling away from what we know. It is not elaborating and telling stories about what is being known. It just knows clearly.

And the more we do this, my hope is that the more we are amazed, the more we're delighted, the more we appreciate this very special capacity we have to know, to sense, to feel, to understand, to imagine, to intend—all these things that support us to be here and now.

And then we come to the third foundation of mindfulness, and this becomes all very important, what I said here, to understand how this begins. Now the discussion is about mindfulness of the mind, *citta*. So *citta* is this wonderful—it's a little bit vague what exactly it is, because just like mind, it's a little bit vague. And I don't know if anybody has the true, real definition of what mind is. But we kind of know what we're talking about, enough.

So *citta* is the same way, but *citta* is this inner quality. It belongs to that realm where the inner quality of our life can become a high-quality inner life, or a free inner life, or a happy inner life, or a peaceful inner life, an intelligent inner life, wise. And it's related to this clarity of mind. And the difference between mind and awareness is not so clear. Some people will translate *citta* as awareness.

And so it begins in the third foundation that when the mind is with greed, one knows a mind is with greed. Some translations I've seen simply say, when the mind is with greed, it has

greed, or we know we have a greedy mind. But the language of the Pāli, I think, is very exact. When the mind is with greed, that's very different than saying when the mind is greedy. When the mind is defined as being greedy, then it's kind of like that's the whole mind.

But when you say, when you know the mind is with greed, then you've made a distinction. There's the greed, and part of the mind, in the mind, there is this act of greed, but it doesn't define the whole mind. The capacity to be aware is not saturated with greed, not filled with greed. It can be, but when the practice is strong enough, when the knowing and seeing and being settled and at ease are strong enough, then we see the greed for the greed. And luckily we see it: "Oh, there's a mind with greed. Look at that," as opposed to, "The mind is greedy," or even worse, "I'm greedy."

To say, "I have some greed. There's a little, you know, I'm kind of with a little bit of greed. I'm with greed. If I look underneath my toenails, yep, there's some greed here." But to tell someone, "I'm greedy," I mean, that's like, ooh, they take a step back. Or if you say, "I am hateful," then they take two steps back. But if you say, "I have some hate, and I know I have it, and I'm not going to act on it because I know it's there, and I'm practicing with it," then maybe instead of taking two steps back, people say, "Oh, that's interesting that you do that. That's fascinating. How do you learn to do that? I've never done that with my hate."

"I thought I had to believe it. I thought I had to be defined by it. That's a novel idea, the way you are with it." So it's a world of difference to have greed, to have hatred, ill will, to have delusion, and see it as just part of who we are, a part of what the mind is, part of the inner life, as opposed to it defining us.

And this is the movement here: to clarify, to make distinctions, to see things distinctly as their own thing, without it all being woven together, all being lumped together in some big mass of meanness, me, myself, and mine. In this regard, the early Buddhist tradition sometimes uses the metaphor of thread and needle to represent desire. Desire is what sews all these things together so they're one big mass together. But if we can see without the influence of desire of all kinds, then we don't sew things together, and we see just distinctly.

If I'm stressed out, fatigued, upset, and I have some ill will toward someone who cuts me off in traffic, I'm liable to do something reactive, honk my horn. But if I'm settled and connected and aware of myself, and seeing clearly what's here, I could see the annoyance, the ill will, arise. And maybe it wouldn't even occur to me to do anything with it. There's no force behind it. There's no glue or hook to hook onto it and go along with it.

Say, "Oh, look at that. I've seen ill will in me arise, and see it arise, and as quickly as it rose,

it just seems to pass right through. There were no hooks for it.” And I've seen it get hooked. That happens too. But in *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, no matter whether we get hooked or not hooked, the default, the protection, the practice where we find our way, is to not fall into the interpretations and the stories about it, the meaning-making mind, but to fall back on the simplicity of knowing. Simple knowing.

“Oh, there was ill will, and I got hooked. Ill will, and there's attachment. Oh, this is what it's like.” But the instructions here are: if there is greed, hatred, delusion—if the mind is with greed, know the mind is with it. And what it presupposes here, or assumes, is that you've done enough of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice up until this point that you're still enough, quiet enough, clear enough, mindful enough, that you're able to see the greed, the ill will, the delusion as its own distinct thing.

It hasn't been mixed up or tied together, sewn together, with all kinds of other things—concepts of self, and our history, and our past, and our future, and our sense of personal meaning, and our fear. There are so many things that somehow can get sewn in there and make it a big, complicated mess. But as the practice gets stronger, “Oh, it's a mind with ill will. It's a mind with desire, greed.”

So this is very distinct from saying, “When there's greed, know there's greed. When there's hate, know there's hate. When there's delusion, know there's delusion.” I mean, that's a good practice to do too, so please do it. But at this point in practice, the expectation is that something is strong enough now that we see the context that's holding awareness of the greed, hatred, and delusion. And it's being held in the context of awareness: an awareness which is unruffled, an awareness which is unreactive, an awareness that's bigger, in a sense, than the particular greed.

And I think that seeing that context for it changes the whole relationship to it all. It makes it easier not to buy into it. It makes it easier to leave it alone. Just seeing greed as greed by itself might work, but it kind of leaves it. Maybe it's too easy to let the power and the influence and the gravitational force of it operate. But to see that it's in a wider context of freedom, of awareness, of knowing, clarity, makes it easier to be free of it.

And of course, there could be other things we know this way. We know there's a mind with confusion. It's a mind with confusion. It's not a confused mind. And it's not likely how you think about yourself. You don't go around saying this about your mind. You're more likely to say, “I'm confused,” or “I'm scared,” as opposed to, “There's some fear here in me. I'm here with my fear.”

As some of you heard my story, when I went rafting down the Grand Canyon, I was afraid the whole three weeks. But I wasn't inhibited by it more than what was appropriate. It was there keeping me safe. So I was one of the people who wasn't injured on the trip. But I just kept my fear on my left shoulder. That was the image I had for myself.

So I was with fear. I wasn't afraid. It was a feeling that we were friends. It was there with me. And when we are fear, are angry, are full of desire, it has a whole difficult influence on us in our inner life. It's hard to have greed without becoming divided and limited and contracted. And it's hard to have it without suffering.

Maybe it's impossible to have greed without suffering. Maybe it's impossible to have hostility and hatred without suffering. Is it possible to have delusion without suffering? I think, as far as I know myself, seemingly the most regular delusion that I have seems to always come with a certain impatience. So they kind of get a little tight, a little contract, a little pressure—the impatience with it.

And I know it's delusion, but it still, you know, that impatient kind of almost overrides—does override sometimes. I do a lot of writing these days, and after I've written my first draft, it's done. I'm ready to send it away. It's perfect. I don't know why my mind keeps doing this. Wake up the next morning and I say, “Oh no, what did I write? It needs to be changed. It needs to be edited.”

But something happens in the system of mine around, “Okay, it's done.” And I'm suffering with that delusion because I have some impatience. It has to go someplace. So, I'm mostly amused by it these days. It's not that dangerous, except for the people I send it to.

So in that fourth *jhāna*, it talks about the clean, clear, bright mind. And this idea of the clarity is kind of—there's a clarity there because of an absence. Just as it's not so easy for people to see or understand or be aware of knowing by itself, it's hard to know and understand many people's awareness. They don't see that they're aware. Awareness has collapsed into what we're aware of.

But as awareness stands out, one of its characteristics is clarity. Or the flip side of clarity, maybe the front and back of clarity, is kind of a certain kind of emptiness. There's nothing there. Happily.

And then, to bring this back to this idea of the quality of the inner life, we are the caretakers for this inner life of ours. And this practice teaches us how healthy, how well this inner life can become, how much peace, how much subtleness, how much calm, how much healthy functioning can operate here. That maybe is connected to this deeper mind or deeper heart

that we have, and that it's possible to rest with that. It's possible to be filled with that. It's possible to be guided by that. It's possible to be inspired by that.

Yes, this is good here. And we discover that it's a good quality of our inner life that doesn't depend on others, doesn't depend on most things that people depend on in this world. It really depends on how you treat yourself. It depends on the movements of your own heart and mind. How much and how little you cling or resist to anything.

In the ancient teachings of the Buddha, one of the most common ways that awakening, liberation, is described is the *citta*, the heart, the mind, heart-mind, becoming free of clinging. But for that to happen, you have to first know your clinging. You have to know the greed, the hatred, delusion. Don't be afraid of clinging. Don't be afraid of having greed, having delusion, having ill will.

Don't be afraid of it if that means you're not going to stop and look at it honestly. The idea is to really practice with it, see it clearly, know it, and in the knowing of it, find your freedom. And, in a way, freedom from ever acting on it, ever believing it, freedom from defining yourself by it.

So when there's a mind with greed, simply know it as a mind with greed. When there's a mind with ill will, simply know it as a mind with ill will. When there's a mind with delusion, simply know it as a mind with delusion. And as you know it this way, if you look beyond the edges of the greed, the edges of the ill will, beyond the edges of the delusion, beyond the edges of the fear, you might see clarity: the clear knowing that holds it all. You might see freedom. The freedom that's always welcoming us, inviting us to be free.

Thank you.