

Monday Dharma talk, week 4

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There's a Sufi story about the wise fool of Sufism named Mulla Nasraddin. And one day—one night—it's dark. Mulla's out on the street under the streetlight, looking for something. A neighbor comes by and says, "Mulla, what are you looking for?" "I'm looking for my keys." "Where did you lose them?" "In my house." "Why are you looking for them here?" "Because this is where the light is."

We could maybe restate this story in Buddhist terms. "What are you doing?" "I'm looking for my mind." "Where did you lose it?" "Deep in my mind." "Why are you looking for it out here?" "Because all I can see is the preoccupations. That's where the light is."

So we're often living in the world of preoccupations, proliferation, stories, commentary, judgments. Hoping, thinking that the solution is found there, that we'll find ourselves there. And it's kind of like looking under the streetlight for something that's at home.

I said earlier that each of us is responsible for the quality of our inner life, the quality of our mind. If we know where to look for it, know where to find it, know what direction. And people spend a lifetime without knowing what that is. In a certain way, lost from their own mind.

And there's a famous Buddhist story, a fable, of a young man who is going to set out to explore the world. He and his friends stay up late the night before he sets out for his trip. He's on this trip and maybe gets drunk and parties or something. And while he's sleeping, his friend wants to take care of his traveling friend, and so sews a very valuable jewel into the lining of his travel coat.

And the young man takes off. He has many adventures, many challenges. Gets lost. Even forgets who he is at times. Lives in poverty. And after many, many years, makes it back to his hometown.

Maybe he stumbles onto his hometown, and his friend sees him. He sees that his friend is haggard and tired and hungry and poor. And his friend said, "Didn't you know that right there in your coat was all the money you needed, all the wealth you needed to live well?" The problem was that he'd sewed it in, but he hadn't told his friend.

And this allegory is used for the idea that we have a jewel, we have something very precious and valuable inside, but we don't know what's there. And so we spend lots of time wandering, wandering around in the dusty lands, becoming impoverished in a certain way. The lands of thinking and planning, remembering and reviewing and fantasizing. And it's a reasonable thing to do, for sure, if that's all we know what to do.

Life is difficult. It's very challenging. And if the only thing we've ever been taught, or the only examples we have of people, is how to find our way through that world of thinking and fantasy and stories, of course we're going to try there to find a solution. And people try heroically. People keep trying and trying and trying. It's amazing how persistent human beings are.

But it makes sense. They think that's how. That's the only way. The only thing they know about how there's a solution. What many people don't know is that it's a little bit like: can you keep picking a scab?

And the paradox is that it's the mind that is the jewel. It's the mind that becomes free. One of the ways that the mind's liberation is described in the *suttas* is that the mind becomes free of its grasping. Free of its grasping, the mind is free. But it's the mind that produces all the things that keep it not free.

The mind produces the very thing that camouflages itself, so that we don't see it properly. And what is repeatedly emphasized is that there's something about seeing clearly by which we become free.

There's a story of the Buddha's son. He had one son, and at some point, his son was also a monastic. And when his son was maybe a young adult, the Buddha discerned, could tell, that his mind was clear enough, steady enough, soft enough, that he was ready for the mind to become free.

And I find it very touching that the Buddha took his son deep into the woods, to this grove of trees that are kind of like the redwood trees of India. So it's kind of a beautiful setting. He sat at the foot of one of these big, great trees on the ground in order to share liberation teachings with his son. And I'll paraphrase it: he kind of did a guided meditation for his son by asking him a series of questions.

And the result of that was the son understood that what is seen and the seeing are inconstant, shifting, changing, impermanent. What is heard and the hearing are inconstant, impermanent. What is tasted and the tasting are inconstant, impermanent, ever-changing. What is smelled and the smelling are inconstant, changing, impermanent. And what doesn't quite work, but what touches us, what is touched, and the touching are impermanent, inconstant.

And then what is known in the mind, and the knowing, are inconstant, impermanent, changing. And that's it. That's considered, that's called the all. There's nothing outside of that. Everything we know about everything really comes through that way.

And to do this guided meditation: see it. Yes, it's all changing. And you get to the last one in particular. Anything the mind knows, what is known, and the knowing itself, is fleeting, is changing all the time. Unless we're so caught in the words, so caught in the images, the thoughts, the ideas, that the concepts, the ideas, are given a kind of permanence, a kind of constancy.

I certainly have succumbed to the delusion of permanence. "It's always going to be like this. The suffering is permanent. The suffering is constant. It never changes." But any suffering you have can only be known through one of these six fields. It can only be known because we see it—it's a sight, and that's inconstant.

We hear it, and that and the hearing are changing. It goes through all of them and comes to the last one, which is maybe the most important for suffering. There's the knowing, the feeling, the sensing of suffering. It's the suffering and the knowing, the suffering and the sensing. That's also always changing, always inconstant, coming and going.

But that's hard to see. And this is where one of the paradoxes of this practice is. The more we think about things, the more we're caught up in our thoughts and ideas, the more we succumb to the delusion of permanence. The more the mind is agitated and spinning, the more the mind is still and quiet, the more the mind sees change.

When the mind is activated, busy, when the mind is spinning around, it thinks things are permanent. In some way, that I'm permanent. But when the mind is at home in itself, quiet and still, all it sees everywhere is change and inconstancy.

And this is actually a very important distinction to make because, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, as I read yesterday, it says one abides, observing inconstancy. So the abiding is not exactly something that's inconstant. The abiding is the quiet, the stillness, the settledness, the clarity of the mind, and that's kind of there in a certain way. That's not inconstant, but everything

that can be seen or heard or known, that's inconstant. That's changing.

And so there's this juxtaposition of these two things. There's the mind that's capable of being still and quiet, peaceful, to abide, to rest. And it's so nice to have a mind like that, to have an awareness like that, because it's kind of like the soft, warm hands that hold a friend's fist. The friend might be quite upset and angry and scared, and they're clenching their fist.

And you gently take your hand and gently hold it. Let the fist rest in your open hand, and then your friend begins to relax the hand. So to have the mind become quiet and still, so it can offer that to the fists of mind, the clenching we have inside, to hold it, to care for it, to love it.

And there's something about observing the change, the ever-changing change. There's a way of seeing it, a way of being reassured. Reassured by the abiding, being reassured about the not grasping, the not clinging. Being reassured that this is a treasure, this is a jewel, this is a relief—to not have the mind so busy at grabbing at everything.

That helps the mind become stiller, still quieter, more peaceful, softer, less preoccupied, less caught in its thoughts. And this process of being less caught, less grasping, and less seduced and less enamored with all our thoughts and ideas and fantasies, history, is called fading away. There's a fading, a weakening, a quieting that happens as we do this practice.

And one of the key quietings, or key insights, is that all the mental activity we do—that spins a tale, that spins permanence, that makes up all kinds of things—all the mental constructs, fabrications, are all shifting and changing all the time. They're inconstant. And to see their inconstancy is life-changing.

To see that, then we don't necessarily believe them so strongly. We might not believe they're constant, but we act as if they are, holding on to them, believing them, carrying them with us, insisting to see the world through them.

There's a short poem in the *Pāli Canon*, called something like the *Song of the Enlightened*, the *Song of the Arahants*.

All mental constructs are inconstant. They have the nature to arise and pass away. They arise and cease. Their stilling is happiness.

So all these constructs that we get caught in, all the ideas and stories, I think it's quite significant that they don't get thrown away. They don't get abandoned or rejected. But there's a stilling. The mind quiets, and there's no longer a need for them, because the still, quiet mind is sublime, is beautiful, is peaceful, is very satisfying.

If you remember, in the middle of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, there's the experience of the *ma-haggata*, the great mind, the expansive mind. In another mindfulness teaching, similarly, in the middle, there's instructions to feel, or see, to experience the mind without its constructs, the mind without all its story-making and fantasies and mental struggles.

And for that, there's a stilling, the quieting of these constructs, to let them quiet. And that's a primary function of concentration: the primary function of quieting and settling and calming the mind, and being able to see the mind without them. And see what a treasure that is, how beautiful it is, how special the mind is.

I don't know if this gives you a little sense of what that mind is like. If you look at your mind, what is your mind? How do you experience your mind when you use no words to explain it? How big is the mind when there's no words to answer the question? How dense is the mind?

How open is the mind? What is the mind beyond the edges of your thoughts? Is there any clarity associated with your mind? To care for this mind, to treasure this mind. This is our inner life that we are trying to care for and support in this practice.

In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, there are mindfulness texts. There's instruction to experience this mind free of its constructs, and then there's the instruction to please the mind, to gladden your mind. I love that instruction. Help your mind feel satisfied, pleased, glad.

Maybe by loving it. Maybe by supporting it with wholesome thoughts and deeds and attitudes. Maybe by caring for it. And all this is part of this settling, quieting of the mind, stilling of the mind.

And when the mind is still enough, quiet enough, clear enough, the way that we see the world can change. We see the change. We see the inconstancy. We see that nothing lasts. Everything is flowing. Everything is part of the river of change.

And in particular, the tradition emphasizes these five bundles, five aggregates. These five ideas and concepts that almost belong to the story-making mind, but they're much simpler. But still, something we make up, build up for ourselves. One observes appearances, feelings, recognitions, constructs of mind, and cognition as inconstant, as suffering, as breaking apart, as empty, as not self.

And when one turns one's mind from those things, one no longer is attracted to those things, and allows the mind to turn and orient to the clarity that is without death, that is peaceful, sublime. That is the stilling of all mental fabrications, the letting go of all attachments, the ending of craving, the fading away, the cessation, *nibbāna*.

So there's the assumption here that at some point, when the mind is still enough, quiet enough, peaceful enough, it's possible to somehow see something in the empty clarity of the mind. Empty clarity is a place with its absence of our clinging, absence of attachment, absence of holding on and resisting, absence of fear. And in that absence, it's peaceful, sublime. It's where there's a stilling of all the mental constructs, the letting go of all attachments.

In that clarity, we find the ending of craving, the fading away, the cessation, *nibbāna*. So there's a shift from being preoccupied with the world of constructs, the world that the mind spins, and having the mind stop spinning, stop making and building, so something different can be seen. Something invaluable and powerful can be seen: the place of freedom. The great clarity that's free of attachment.

And this expression, "*Ehipassiko*," "come and see." Come, come here and see this glorious absence, this freedom. It's here. See it well enough that the mind becomes quieter, stiller, maybe deeper.

So the mind sees clearly that clinging does not serve us. That clinging gets in the way of that which is the healthiest possibility for this mind of ours, this heart. Clinging obscures the free, peaceful, and happy heart and mind. The trade-off of always clinging is not worth it. It doesn't provide much benefit.

But releasing the grip of clinging is the greatest benefit. It's the greatest treasure. Oh. Oh. Oh. Okay. Oh. Oh. Yeah. Ah. Okay. Oh.