Deepening Practice (3/5): Conversations that Open the Heart

Dharma talk by Diana Clark

September 16, 2026 at the Insight Meditation Center, Redwood City, CA

So, we'll continue with the series on deepening practice. And for those of you who haven't been here the last couple of mornings, we're spending this week with the Meghiya Sutta and with this question: What helps practice deepen?

Meghiya was pretty sure he thought he knew what he needed, and what he needed was a beautiful quiet place to meditate. But then his meditation didn't go as he expected. And then the Buddha responded to Meghiya reporting this by giving him five conditions that support a deepening of practice. And we've looked at two of them so far. Spiritual friendship, that our practice is supported by others on Monday. Tuesday, living with care, ethical living, bringing care and the wish to not harm into the way we live.

And today we come to the third support: the kinds of conversation that can support and deepen our practice. So this third support is more specific than simply having good conversations. The Buddha describes what kind of conversations. That is, conversations that are concerned with simplifying and letting go, and conversations that are conducive to opening the heart.

I want to go back and talk a little bit about this narrative element that's happening, the context in which this is happening. As I mentioned, Meghiya saw this beautiful mango grove and wanted to go there to meditate. And he asked the Buddha a number of times because Meghiya had this definite idea of what was going to help. When it doesn't go as he planned, the Buddha then gives him these five supports. But I want to offer something here to point out that the Buddha gives Meghiya a beneficial conversation. They have a beneficial conversation, and that's actually also one of the supports for what helps practice deepen. So the Buddha is providing Meghiya with something that he's needed.

Why do we think that the Buddha is offering this? Because we all recognize that beneficial conversations can make a difference. But I want to dig in a little bit more into what this means and why it might be relevant for us and why it was relevant for Meghiya.

So Meghiya, maybe I haven't mentioned this before, was the Buddha's attendant. Before Ananda[3], it was Meghiya. Meghiya saw this mango grove and wanted to meditate, so he goes to the Buddha and says, "If the Buddha allows me, I'll go back to that mango grove to meditate." And the Buddha replies, "We're alone right now. Wait until another mendicant shows up."

The Buddha needed an attendant, and he didn't want to be without one. The attendant would be somebody that would interface with all the people that were coming to see the Buddha. But

Meghiya really wants to go. He has this idea, "No, I need to meditate, and I'm going to go meditate in that mango grove." So when the Buddha says, "No, why don't you wait?" Meghiya replies, "Venerable sir, you have nothing more to do and nothing that needs improvement, but I do. So if you allow me, I'll go to this mango grove."

I guess it's kind of cheeky in his response to the Buddha. It's quite something to say this. And then for the second time, the Buddha responds the same. He says, "No, why don't you wait? Wait until somebody else comes here." And then for the third time, Meghiya says, "Venerable sir, [Laughter] the Buddha has nothing more to do and nothing that needs improvement, but I do. If you allow me, I'll go back to that mango grove to meditate." And then the Buddha relents and says, "Okay, you can go."

So Meghiya has this thought, "I need to practice. I know exactly what I need to do." But the Buddha is widening this frame when giving these additional supports for practice. There's something more just than meditation. The Buddha is acknowledging meditation matters. Solitude matters, but other conditions do too.

And so we could say that this could be one of the benefits of a beneficial conversation. Sometimes we can't see beyond our present understanding. We have an idea about exactly what's needed and we feel like we're just going to go and do this, but we might not see fully or see clearly. And there's a way in which a conversation can open a door that we didn't know was there. It can question an assumption we're having. A conversation can remind us of something we've forgotten, or point us towards another way of understanding.

This happened for me very recently. I was describing to a friend of mine something that I was going to do as a support for my life, my practice. I said something like, "I think that's what I'm going to do." And my friend replied, "Or not." [Laughter]

It was so helpful for me to see how I had this very distinct idea of what was needed, and maybe it was a little bit too much. Now when I think about it, it was such a way in which this friend was being such a good friend to me.

So the Buddha is talking about conversation, but he's not just talking about any old conversation. He's talking about a direction of a beneficial conversation. How do you know what's beneficial? Specifically, he mentions ten separate topics, but I'm going to simplify them here and say that these topics are three different movements or directions, and they include simplifying, cultivating, and freeing.

Topics of conversation can really support this movement of simplifying, cultivating, and freeing. Because our conversations do actually have directions, right? Sometimes we can be in a conversation in which we, during it and after it, find ourselves a little bit more caught, a little bit more tangled than when we began. We might have conversations in which we are rehearsing

what someone else has done wrong or what we've done wrong, or strengthening a story that we've told about ourselves again and again. Or maybe we have conversations that are just reinforcing some particular aversions or desires, and we feel a little bit more caught in them.

But there are also conversations which we can have which help move us towards contentment or simplification, moving away from entanglement and towards simplicity. Or maybe there are conversations that help move us from confusion towards more wisdom, some letting go, or some freedom. So one way to recognize these beneficial conversations the Buddha is pointing to is this question: where does this conversation lead the heart, lead the mind?

One of the expressions that the Buddha uses to describe these conversations is conversations that help in not getting bound up with others, not getting tangled, entangled. This is an interesting paradox because the first support was about spiritual friendship. So clearly relationships are important, but good spiritual friendships help us become less entangled. A friend doesn't always have to agree exactly with our story. Sometimes teachers are considered good spiritual friends, and maybe they turn our attention back towards our minds, back towards our experience in that moment rather than a story. Or maybe a conversation with a spiritual friend helps us remember something that helps us to have an understanding that we don't have access to at that time.

So we could say that one aspect of beneficial conversations is that it doesn't simply reinforce what we already know or believe we know. Beneficial conversations open the heart, open the mind. So it's often hearing something that we weren't expecting. Maybe beneficial conversations are helping us loosen our certainty in a way that allows us to be receptive, in a way that allows us to learn something new that is helpful.

I am not saying to abandon discernment or to give up what confidence or faith that we have, but a beneficial conversation can reconnect us with practice. The beneficial conversation changes the question from, "How can I get confirmation of what I know about myself and about the world?" or "How can I continue to look like I have it together?" or "How can I continue to look like I don't have it together?" We do both, right? But it changes the questions from how can I look a certain way to, "Where is the freedom in this moment?"

Where is the freedom in this moment? Freedom sometimes comes from learning, from understanding things in a new way. So these beneficial conversations don't have to be formal dharma topics. Sometimes it's just more ordinary. Someone reminds us of what really matters. Someone doesn't join us in resentment. Someone offers a few words that helps us see things differently.

Returning to Meghiya, when Meghiya returns from this mango grove, troubled and surprised by his mind being filled with sensual thoughts, cruel thoughts, malicious thoughts, the Buddha

offers him a larger way of understanding what has happened. Practice depends upon conditions. Those conditions can be cultivated, and they ultimately point towards wisdom and liberation, more freedom. And so the Buddha isn't just telling Meghiya, "Beneficial conversations are important." He offers a beneficial conversation to Meghiya, and it opens Meghiya's understanding.

Meghiya was so convinced that he had to meditate in that mango grove. But maybe what was helpful is for him to have this connection with the Buddha, and learn here are some of the supports for practice.

So maybe we can carry one simple question into the day today: what kinds of conversations support simplifying and letting go? What kinds of conversations open the heart, open the mind? And this recognition that these conversations can help our practice deepen.

So, thank you. Thank you for your practice.

---

1. **Meghiya Sutta:** A discourse found in the Pali Canon (Udana 4.1 and Anguttara Nikaya 9.3) in which the Buddha gives advice to his attendant Meghiya on the supportive conditions for meditation. ↩
2. **Anguttara Nikaya:** The "Numerical Discourses" of the Buddha's teachings in the Pali Canon. ↩
3. **Ananda:** The Buddha's primary attendant and cousin, known for his formidable memory, who recited many of the Buddha's discourses at the First Buddhist Council. ↩

Additional talks by Diana at AudioDharma.org

Additional transcripts and links to YouTube videos at Moonpointing.com with deep bows of appreciation to Dan Murphy.

More information about Diana's teachings at DianaClarkDharma.org

Share the love! Donate to Diana