The Moment is Always Moving

Dharma talk by Diana Clark

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So as I mentioned at the beginning of the guided meditation, this is the fourth talk in a series, *When Life Doesn't Obey Us*. I don't know, every time I hear myself saying or writing this word "obey," I feel a little squeamish or something. But at the same time, I like it because it's kind of this exaggerated way in which, without realizing—well, maybe I should speak for myself—without myself realizing it, I was expecting that life would obey these demands that I didn't even know I had.

So there's a way in which we may not even notice it, but much of the time we are hoping or expecting for a more reliable or predictable moment. For example, a moment that stays pleasant or comfortable, or unfolds according to how we think it should unfold. A moment that doesn't disappoint or ask too much of us, that matches our preferences.

And this is so human. Of course, we have expectations. Of course, we make plans. And of course, we try to arrange conditions so life will feel safer, smoother, comfortable, and more manageable. And there's nothing wrong with planning. Calendars are helpful. Grocery lists are helpful. It's generally good to remember appointments and take care of our bodies and respond to responsibilities.

But there's a place, there's a time that's maybe subtle where planning turns into something else. It's maybe a quiet demand that life behave somehow. Maybe there's this way we have this attempt, we want to secure the future to be a particular way, or maybe we have this fantasy that if only we could manage things well enough, then the next moment won't be disturbing or the next moment will match our preferences.

And this is where suffering, this is where dukkha[2] begins to gather. Because life is always changing. Our experiences are always changing. Always. And the suffering arises not because life is changing, but because we're trying to make the changing moment into something that's static and guaranteed and predictable, and we know exactly how it's going to be. The suffering starts because we're trying to make this dynamic, moving, changing moment into something that matches our preferences all the time.

And I feel a little awkward saying this out loud because to hear it, it's like, "That's not happening. Diana, what are you talking about?" But I've discovered for myself that it was subtle, underneath so much of what I was doing, and indeed maybe even why I came to a spiritual practice or continued practicing, was this maybe unspoken expectation that somehow my life

would be managed better, that I could get life to be *better*. Not recognizing that life is always changing. Of course it is. Of course it is. And what I was thinking was trying to capture it and keep it solid and steady and predictable, and I know exactly when it is.

But something that we notice the more that we meditate is that much of our suffering or difficulties or uncomfortableness comes from trying to negotiate with reality after it has already arrived. Much of our difficulty or suffering comes from trying to negotiate with reality after it's already arrived. It's already here. It's already being known. It's already being experienced. And we're trying to make it be different. But it can't be different. It's what it is.

The negotiations are happening after something has arisen. Something's happened. The traffic is slow. The meditation was restless. The appointment was canceled. The body is uncomfortable. And then the mind starts, I'm using this word "negotiate" or maybe "demand" or trying to make things obey us. The mind is like, "What? This shouldn't be happening. This needs to be different. I would be okay if something else were happening." But the moment has already arrived.

And this doesn't mean that we approve of everything. It doesn't mean that we become passive. And it doesn't mean that we stop responding wisely. That's not what I'm saying. It means that we can begin by aligning with reality, by telling the truth in some kind of way. "This is what is here. This is the moment that's actually being experienced. This is what life has offered whether I ordered it or not."

So I want to say expectations aren't the problem. Planning isn't the problem. That's unavoidable. The mind is going to put expectations onto each moment. It's a natural part of being human. The problem is when we forget they are expectations. We begin to treat them as agreements, that somehow a contract that we signed with reality, like, "No, no, you're not holding up your side of the bargain."

Another way to think about this that I often think about is that expectations are completely in the mind. One hundred percent. They're made up in the mind. They are insubstantial. They're this thought pattern in the mind. And then we might say there's an experience. And then we're laying on top of our experience this mental idea about how things should be. And there is always a gap between what's actually happening and our ideas about it. There's always a gap. There has to be because what's in the mind is not the same thing that was being experienced. Our ideas about something are different than what's actually happening.

And so there's this way that when this gap is noticed or felt or experienced, it feels like a violation somehow, or some sense like, "No, this isn't supposed to happen."

There's this way, though, that, you know, the moment is always moving. So maybe even if there is a moment in which the gap between our expectations and what's being experienced closes,

it's just for a moment, because then the experience is changing. And it's kind of funny to say this, but you know, the moment doesn't really need our permission to do anything, to be anything, to move.

And this is part of the, maybe the humbling and freeing truth of practice, as we start to see that we're not commanding, we don't control, we're not in charge of what's happening, because the moment, the experience is not something we own. It's not a possession. It's not *mine*. The moment is the moment. And the practice is: can we just meet the moment of what is actually here right now?

And we could say, well, when we have this sense that life is not obeying us, when life is not matching our preferences, we can pause. We can notice that, we can feel that slight little frustration or discomfort and ask, "What's actually here? What's actually happening? What expectation am I holding? And am I arguing in some kind of way with a moment that's already arrived?" Then, can this moment be met just as it is without trying to manage it?

So when life doesn't obey us, when it's not meeting our preferences, I'm going to say maybe *this* moment, one moment at a time. I said the word "life," but maybe that feels too general. Let's bring it down into a moment. When a moment doesn't obey us, can we pause and ask, "What is actually here? What's the experience?" There'll be bodily experiences. There'll be thoughts. There'll be maybe some resistance or some clinging. And can we notice, "What expectations am I holding? What were the ideas that we had?" This doesn't have to be an archaeological dig, a big psychological project. Just feeling in like, "Oh yeah, I was expecting that the meditation would go smoothly and be restorative, but instead I'm finding it to be restless."

And then is there a way we can just feel into, "Am I arguing with a moment that's already arisen, passed, and left? That's just moving?" And can I allow the next moment, *this* moment, to be met without trying to manage it but just to be known?

This is such a subtle but powerful shift. Can we go from trying to control in a subtle way to just contact with what's actually happening? Can we move from this resistance like, "No, this isn't matching my preferences" or "I want this to stay because it does match my preferences." Can we have this shift from resistance to maybe a recognition like, "Okay, this is what's happening." Can we have this shift from managing the moment, trying to make it different, to *meeting* the moment? "This is how it is."

And this meeting the moment doesn't mean that we like it. It doesn't mean that we're condoning it. It means that we're beginning where we are. It's letting the truth of the moment register, be known. It's letting the reality of this moment be experienced. It's allowing us to respond from contact with experience rather than from denial.

Because we may imagine that freedom, more peace and ease means life has finally become the way we want it to, and we can manage it and manipulate it in a certain way. Or maybe it's predictable in a way that makes us feel safe. Or maybe there's a way in which the body behaves and we feel good, or the mind calms down and our memory is good and we have some clarity, or maybe it's that other people are finally acting wisely, or plans are unfolding smoothly, or the moment stops surprising us. We have all these ways in which we think that, "Okay, well there'll be more freedom and peace when life finally behaves or the moment finally behaves."

But that's not the freedom. It's not real freedom. That might be moments of ease. That might be moments of pleasure. But it's not the real freedom that the dharma points us toward. The freedom is not found in making the present moment match our preferences. The freedom is being able to meet every moment with less fear, with less argument, with less resistance, with more steadiness, with more tenderness, with more just meeting what's actually here.

This can feel a little unsettling. The teaching is not that we should stop caring and it's not that we should stop planning. I mean, the teaching is that life is not controllable in the way that we would like. As I've been unfolding in this series, comfort comes and goes. The body has its own unfolding. Thoughts arise by themselves, and the moment is always moving. So the invitation is, can we notice when we are trying to negotiate with reality after it has already arrived, and we just meet life directly even though the moment is always moving.

So thank you. Thank you for your practice and I'll see you tomorrow.

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1. **Dukkha:** A Pali word often translated as "suffering," "stress," or "unsatisfactoriness." ↩

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

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