



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

The Cultivation of Knowledge: Understanding and Releasing Dukkha

Kim Allen

Jul 23, 2022 2:17:50

It's nice to be here. So let's talk a little bit about shifts in understanding, which is kind of the theme for today. It's very natural that our understanding will shift along the path. You know, there will be changes in how we understand things. That's kind of what it means to walk the path, actually. And it doesn't just mean an accumulation of knowledge over time.

There are sometimes that we realize that we have come into an entirely new way of seeing things, and we're actually going to have to change our behavior or our practice in order to be in line with how we've come to see things through practice. So today we're going to focus particularly on our understanding of dukkha and the end of dukkha. And I deliberately use the Pali word there because we may not know quite how to say that in English. I mean, suffering, unsatisfactoriness, stress, we'll see different possibilities. But we'll also see that releasing dukkha, you know, what it means to be free from dukkha, we would think that would be simple enough. But that also changes along the path, how we understand that.

So these ideas, of course, lie at the very heart of Buddhist practice. It's about suffering and the end of suffering. The Buddha said sometimes that's all he teaches. So these are not static ideas to learn their dynamic, active knowledges that we cultivate, the knowledge of dukkha, the knowledge of the end of dukkha. When we set out to understand dukkha, our understanding begins one way, and then it changes as we mature in practice. And the same is true for letting go.

So maybe just take a moment to reflect. Can you think of some part of the Dharma that you understand differently than when you started practice? And even if you just started practice recently, probably there's already been some kind of shift. So just bearing that in mind, let's talk about this first noble truth, the one concerning dukkha. It says simply in kind of broad terms that there is dukkha in life, and according to the first discourse of the Buddha, the very first sermon that he gave, the definition goes like this, and this one translates dukkha as suffering. Now this, bhikkhus, meaning us, practitioners, is the first noble truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering.

In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. So don't worry too much about the technical term at the end about the aggregates, but I think we can kind of relate to those things. And then in that same sutta there are tasks associated with each of the truths, and for the first truth it says, this noble truth of suffering is to be fully

This transcript is machine generated and will contain errors

[Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

sati.org

1 of 31



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

understood. That's the task. So I came across a nice quote by the scholar Gethan who said, Developing an understanding of the first noble truth involves not so much the revelation that dukkha exists as the realization of what dukkha is. Does anyone really need a lot of help to understand that dukkha exists? I don't think so.

I think we understand that one right away. But the realization of what dukkha really is, that can pull the mind pretty deep. And we'll talk a little bit more specifically about different possibilities for how we could understand what dukkha is. But just to know that this task of fully understanding suffering is something that goes on for a long time can be helpful. And we'll also talk about the third noble truth. We're not only going to talk about dukkha, that's coming later today.

So for completeness then, let's just mention the tasks for each of the noble truths. So for dukkha it was to fully understand. For the origin or the arising of dukkha, that's the second noble truth, the task is to abandon that, to abandon the causes or the conditions for it. For the third noble truth, the cessation of dukkha, the task is to realize it, to fully realize that. And for the path to the cessation of dukkha, that's the fourth noble truth, the task is to develop it. So let's think about that.

To develop the path, I would suggest that some of what we develop on the path is the ability to do the other tasks. We develop in how we understand dukkha. We develop in how our ability to realize the end of dukkha. So the proposition for our session today is that we're going to apply the fourth noble truth to the other truths, or particularly to the first and the third truth. Sound okay? Yeah. I think we sometimes don't realize how the process of the path can be a little bit subtle sometimes.

We just do our sitting every day. We come to events at IMC. We talk with people. And then we wake up one day and realize, oh, wait a minute, something was really changed. And that's normal. And sometimes it's helpful to really bring that to awareness.

Okay, so let's do a sitting to delve a little bit more deeply into our current understanding of this quality of dukkha. So find a posture that would be good for meditation. Find a comfortable place to sit. Settle into a balanced posture. I like to even shift back and forth a little bit or forward and back in order to really find the center point where I'm sitting. And if you're comfortable doing so, you can close your eyes.

Maybe taking a little time to deliberately go through the body and soften the areas where we tend to hold some tension. So softening the muscles of the face, the forehead, around the eyes, the jaw, softening the eyes and the eye sockets, down through the throat, into the shoulders. I think the shoulders drop a bit without rolling forward. Maybe thinking of sliding the shoulder blades down the back, bringing attention

This transcript is machine generated and will contain errors

[Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

sati.org

2 of 31



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

into the chest area, feeling the front back sides of the rib cage, allowing those to soften. Releasing the diaphragm and softening down through the belly and the low back, just allowing the balance and the straightness of the spine to support the body. Softening the hip joints, releasing any bracing in the legs.

Generally just inviting ease throughout the body. And if there are parts that are sore or still tense, that's totally fine. We have ease in the mind about how the body is right now. Just allowing awareness to be soft, mindfulness of the body, hearing sounds, letting any thoughts or emotions just be there. Just maintaining a sense of simple presence. Softening the head, So, in this meditation, I'm going to suggest several different areas of life where we tend to experience some of what the Buddha called dukkha.

And so, in each case, I'll invite you to call to mind some aspect of that area that's challenging for you. Don't choose the heaviest thing. The purpose of the reflection is to feel your relationship to dukkha and sort of your current understanding. So, one clear area where we experience dukkha is the body. Perhaps you have some pain or illness or injury or just the usual challenges of getting older. So, just touch into some aspect of the body that for you there is some dukkha, some unsatisfactoriness, some pain, some suffering.

Just notice how that is in your mind. How do you relate to that? And just breathe. And then you can release that and just go back to the open awareness. Continuing to breathe. And then a second area where the Buddha points out that we often experience challenge, dukkha, is the stress of some kind of change in your life. Perhaps your work has shifted.

You've lost your job or something. You've been reassigned. Or there's been a shift in a relationship. Or some activity you used to enjoy is no longer available. And on a smaller scale, there are the innumerable changes that we deal with all day, keeping our body comfortable, the changes of emotions, the challenge of thinking and responding, being on all day. There's really no break from change.

How do you relate to those kinds of stresses? Just feeling in your mind and heart your understanding of the challenges of change. Breathing. And then once you feel you have a sense of that, softening again into the open awareness. Breathing. And then the third area and the last one we'll touch into, where the Buddha pointed out the difficulty of being human, is the kind of fundamental difficulty of getting everything aligned. Your health, body, food, your work, your emotions, relationships, finances, living situation, politics, providing support to others.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

Can you get all of that working well at the same time and keep it that way? This is hard. Feel the dukkha of the maintenance of a human life and psyche. How do you see that? How do you feel that in your body and heart and mind? Breathing with that. And when you have a sense of that, just open again the awareness to the body sitting. You may wish to pass your attention again through the body, softening in the present moment. All is fine.

You're sitting here. Take a moment to wish well for yourself. And to wish well for other people. Simple meta that feels natural after touching into dukkha. Sometimes it's valuable to take in what we're up against, in a sense, what we signed up for in this human life. I'd like to talk now a little bit more specifically about some possibilities for how we shift in our understanding of dukkha.

Remember in the words of Gethan, it's not so much just about knowing that there is dukkha, but understanding what dukkha is. And that has to do with how we view, how we relate to these challenges of human life. So generally our understanding of the dharma refines over the course of practice. So that means it gets more nuanced, more subtle. In some ways it gets complexified and in some ways it gets simplified. So I want to talk about several different ways that we understand dukkha.

I'm actually going to talk about three. And they generally go from grosser to subtler, but the order may not be exact. And how it's unfolding for you may not be exact either. So the first, we'll start with dukkha as pain. When we first arrive in practice, we tend to have a very personal sense of dukkha. Not everyone comes in this way, but many people arrive in Buddhist practice because of some difficulty, an illness, or a difficulty in a relationship.

We tend to see it as our situation, my challenge, my losing my job, or losing my house. Or we might be struggling more with difficult mental states like depression or anxiety or other things that would easily we could call suffering. Most people understand this type of dukkha right away. And it even has a name that I think you'll appreciate. It's called dukkha-dukkha. So sometimes people have the feeling that Buddhism is kind of a respectful religion because it acknowledges and it affirms right up front.

As soon as you walk in the door, it says, yeah, that's right, the human condition is challenging. I remember feeling kind of relieved to hear that. It's like, oh, okay, somebody is actually saying this. So usually our first sense of dukkha as pain like this tends to be individual and personal. It's our situation. That's not always the case.

Sometimes people arrive because they're very distressed by the pain of the world. That's also true. But a common thread between these two is that the problem is usually



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

seen as external. It's that situation, that person, those people, those systems, whatever it is, that's the usual thing. And so as we begin to work with this kind of dukkha, often the approach is to put more supportive and wholesome conditions in place somehow. So externally we might change jobs, we might change friends, we might shift our work to be more supportive of our health.

That's a very common thing that people do near the beginning of practice. And that's also, though, there are big changes that go on internally when we work with dukkha-dukkha. So we practice meditation. We calm down a bit, we feel less tense physically, and we gain some mental awareness. When I first started practice, I was quite physically tense. I didn't even know it until I started practicing, really.

But I spent a number of years consciously relaxing my body and balancing my posture. I mean, of course, I had other aspects of my practice, but that was a pretty big part of my practice, which is wherever I was, could I relax a little bit? And we start to have some moments of genuine mental ease. And we have experiences where we are patient instead of getting angry and we're amazed. Oh, I would have snapped at that person earlier. So some of this initial, we could also call it outright dukkha, can begin to lessen. And just to be clear, this dukkha-dukkha can happen at any time along the path.

It's not only at the beginning, but it tends to be more prominent at the beginning, let's say. And so often at the beginning, we see this as the very definition of dukkha. That's what dukkha is, right? It's all the problems in my life and all the challenge, all the terrible things happening in the world. That's what dukkha is. And that's true. That is true that that is part of dukkha.

But we don't stop there. And in some sense, just dealing with outright dukkha is a little bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. And we start to realize that. So Buddhism asks us to go farther than that. So that's good to start there. But the Buddha asks us to keep looking at dukkha.

And this is mindfulness practice. We have to keep looking, not to be satisfied with just improving the conditions in some ways. Maybe we haven't fully understood yet. Now it turns out that experiencing more of a sense of well-being, which tends to come about as we do meditation, we work with our job, we work with our health, we work with our relationships, that is one of the conditions. Getting some well-being in place is one of the conditions for starting to see other layers of dukkha. So we see more subtle forms of dukkha that operate even when our life is generally good.

You might remember that in the story of the Buddha's life, he led actually quite a sheltered life growing up. And we may not have had that ourselves growing up. But at

This transcript is machine generated and will contain errors

[Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

sati.org

5 of 31



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

least we can get better conditions in place. And then we look at the Buddha's world where he was sheltered, he had nice sensual things, he was protected, etc. But he was dissatisfied with that. Even growing up with that his whole life, he got a sense that that was not the point.

And so we too will start to have that sense as our lives, just in a general sense, get better. So then we might come to include in our idea of dukkha that it also includes what's called unsatisfactoriness and unreliability. So as we look more deeply, we see that things keep changing. We can't hold on to all of our good mind-states, all of our good life situations. They do tend to change. And of course, you know, the difficult ones change also, and that's good, but it's hard to, you know, totally maintain the positive ones.

And we have a deepening understanding that experiences are not controllable, they're not completely repeatable, and that all pleasant experiences in general are going to eventually change or end. And this is what is called the, there's a name for this also, the suffering of change, viparinama dukkha. And that's a polyterm, but it does mean the suffering of change, but it's not change like the general term change. It means degradation or decline over time. You know, I don't think I need to explain that one too much either, right? You get things in place, and then over time they drift out of alignment, they decay. Even, you know, all kinds of good things eventually change.

And so we still might have a sense that a lot of this is happening due to external conditions. You know, people aren't maintaining things. But nonetheless, we can start to see a more universal dimension. When we start seeing dukkha more as unsatisfactoriness or unreliability, there's a sense, there's a realization that it's not, it's not just in my situation, like everybody, all humans are subject to these changing circumstances. And we start to also get a sense that a lot of the challenge of the world is that people are reacting to that. Maybe they don't understand that things always change.

And so there's a lot of grasping and denying and pushing away and anger. And a lot of that is reactivity to the fact that things change somewhat uncontrollably for humans. And we realize that the problems of the world largely stem from what the Buddha called a dart embedded in each person's heart, you know, our deep inability to gain lasting happiness from worldly conditions. There's quite a moving sutta where he talks about the dart. And you can imagine, you know, it's like you've got a thorn that you can't quite, you don't know that's what it is. And so all you feel is a sense of urgency right in the heart.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

And he talks about people running around, people run around, run around, run around, because they don't see the thorn in the heart. And with some practice, we start to get a sense of that in ourselves. And it's only a short leap to realize, oh, that's what's going on for everyone. So we have to see more and more clearly. It's not so much that we. .

. How shall I say it? We have to see that there's a dart there. And then we have to see clearly enough to be able to know where it is, to pull it out. But part of the process is really seeing that dart. That's why dukkha is to be fully understood. We also see at this stage that our own mind is playing a major role in our happiness, actually.

The second verse of the Dhammapada says, all experiences preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind, speak or act with a peaceful mind, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow. The conditions aren't completely controllable, but there's something about the way our mind is that has an effect on our happiness. Learning more about dukkha also correspondingly, we learn more about happiness. We'll get on to that more in the second half. But we see that our own mind really matters in terms of our well-being. Just as a very practical example, if we move to another town because things weren't so good where we were living, so we moved somewhere else, those conditions are then better if we're in some other more favorable location for us.

But we've also taken our mind with us, haven't we? So we have habits about how we relate to things, and those come back. We change jobs, and initially the new job is so much better, and it might be better in some ways. But we've brought our mind with us, and there's still some habitual ways that we relate to things. So we start to realize, oh, okay, happiness and non-suffering in general are going to be an inside job. They're going to be an inside job. That was the name, I think, of one of Sylvia Borstein's books, Happiness is an Inside Job.

And so we see that our initial techniques, where what we did was fix our external conditions and get some better, more wholesome things in place, that's good, but it may not be quite enough. So we get better at handling change through internal methods, equanimity, resilience, patience, meta, compassion naturally increases, because we see that others are subject to the vagaries of life also, no matter their situation, no matter how favorable it seems for someone else. They too have to go through the changes. That too will degrade at some point. So if we just keep practicing with all of this, then the Dharma continues to deepen. At each stage, the conditions that we have in place are exactly what allow us to see the next level.

So then there's another way of understanding dukkha, another dimension to it that we might want to bring in in our broadening, full understanding of dukkha. And that is just to see dukkha as stress, some kind of stress. So at some point, we see this maybe



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

because we've gotten to the point in practice where we can have a lot of wholesome states, we've cultivated mindfulness, maybe we've even cultivated concentration, or the Brahma Viharas, meta, karuna, we feel a lot of that. And then when we do vipassana meditation, insight meditation from a wholesome mind state, we start to see more and more clearly how our own mental conditioning is functioning. We see that despite our very intentions of wanting non-suffering, which is why we practice, why we're working so hard as humans, we have these sort of subtle subterranean forces in the mind that keep us enacting what we know brings difficulty, grasping of some kind, greed, hatred, delusion at some level. But we see that the very conditioning of the mind, the stories that we're telling, the patterns that we bring in, mostly what we're doing with our mental functioning is we're trying to get more of what's pleasant and keep out what's unpleasant.

That's basically the MO of the human, how we operate. But we carry deep stories of what we need, who we are, how we need to be, and there's some level of ongoing stress in maintaining that storyline. Some of these are personal, coming from our own experience. We had an experience of something and that forever shaped our view of how to deal with certain things. But others we got from our family, from our culture. We're not personally responsible for all of the stories that got implanted into us.

There is a form of dukkha that's kind of built into the system. One pattern that we see repeatedly is the self, of course, the formation of our self as a separate entity. And we see that every time we do that, every time we separate ourselves out, there's something stressful about that, in a sense. Not that we want to just melt into nothingness, there is a function for the self, but there's a certain energy taken in with that. So this is the kind of dukkha, this is named for this too. The Buddha called this sankara dukkha, the difficulty of formations.

And I know this is starting to sound more abstract, but eventually we see that the fact that the mind is busy constructing so much of what we see. It's got a story about this, a perception about that, a view about this, an understanding of what's going on. And we start to see that all of that comes with a little bit of stress. Every time we've intended something, separated something out, created something, built something, that process has a little bit of tension or tightness to it. That last part of the definition of dukkha that I read said, in short, the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha. And the five aggregates are the aspects of experience that we use to construct a self and a world.

And so the five aggregates are in Pali, they're called the khandhas. And I wanted to read a quote from Ajahn Munn, who was a wonderful Thai forest monk. And his awakening poem, if you want to call it that, was called The Ballad of Liberation from the Five Khandhas. And he says, the heart, knowing the dhamma of ultimate ease, sees for



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

sure that the khandhas are always stressful. The dhamma stays as the dhamma, the khandhas stay as the khandhas. That's all.

So there's no solution to sankara dukkha in the conditioned world. We can't create better conditions such that conditions are not oppressive. So conditions themselves are oppressive. And that, when we get to that point, that is when the mind can let go into really the end of suffering. We can't do it only through wholesome karma. Something else is going to have to happen.

But don't worry, it comes about naturally through the process of practice. So I wanted to run through that as kind of a grand tour, if you will, of different layers of dukkha. And at the end, it starts to sound like, what? Anything I do is stressful. Yes, that's true. There is a point where we see that. I think one of the Thai forest masters also said, you can't go back.

You can't go forward. And you can't stay where you are. When you get to that point, something very interesting happens. So let me stop there after kind of laying out these. This teaching on three different kinds of dukkha is, well, it's from a slightly later text, but the dukkha-dukkha, the viparinama-dukkha, and the sankara-dukkha, those are kind of the different layers that were asked to understand. It's a classical teaching on a little bit of refinement of different kinds of dukkha.

And I'm curious if you have any questions at this point about understanding dukkha. Yes, and we do have a microphone. Is somebody willing to leap up and grab that green one? Thank you. And if you just press the button on it and a little green light comes on, then it'll be easier for everyone to hear. Thank you. I was wondering if you could talk more about what it means to fully realize dukkha and what it means to develop the path.

Okay, so you're referring to the tasks. So for dukkha, it's to be fully understood, actually. The realization is for the third noble truth, the cessation of dukkha should be fully realized. Although, I realize now that the quote from Gethyn might have sounded like it. The quote from Gethyn said, developing an understanding of the first noble truth involves not so much the revelation that dukkha exists as the realization of what dukkha is. So even though it uses the word realization, the task is to understand what dukkha is.

So does that mean that that's the same thing, to understand and to fully realize? Or is it like a different understanding? I think it's pointing to the same thing. The realization of what dukkha is is to fully understand. The issue is that we don't actually realize, we don't completely understand what dukkha is. We think it's about my pain when we first arrive, and then we realize slowly in the process of fully understanding it is to understand more

This transcript is machine generated and will contain errors

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

sati.org

9 of 31



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

and more deeply these dimensions of it. You know, why is it so difficult that I have this illness? Why am I suffering so much in this relationship or my job? And so first we think, well, I need a new job. This job is terrible.

My boss is difficult. I don't make enough money. And that's true at some level. But as we work with the difficulty, we really take on, okay, can I work with the suffering, the challenges in my life while being mindful, really feeling where is the difficulty? We unfold these other layers. We realize, oh, actually, there isn't a job that's perfect. There can't be.

And then we realize, wow, I mean, to be a human and to have to make a livelihood, I'm not even in control of that completely. It depends on the economy. It depends on all kinds of other things. And why do I think I need that, actually? And how did that all come about? And what am I believing about myself? And we unfold more and more layers. So we're really mostly on the dukkha side right now. But in the second half of today, we'll talk about our evolving understanding of what freedom from dukkha means.

And at first we think, oh, at the preview, we think, oh, it'll be getting all pleasant experience. I'll set it all up correctly finally. I'll get the right job, the right relationship, the right house, I'll get the dog working, you know, I'll get everything all, and then I'll keep it that way. Wow, that's not the end of dukkha. That's an idea, fantasy, a delusion I heard, spoken. But that's where we start.

That's not even actually at the level that the Buddha started talking about yet, what the ending of dukkha is. But we unfold more and more layers. And it's actually better and better news. You know, we don't have to accomplish all of making our life perfect in order to find the end of suffering. Wow, that's good news. So to get there, we have to really get at what is that problem that we're trying to solve.

And so that's what we're delving into now is the unfolding of these different layers. If your tasks really were to eliminate the stress that your mind feels when it's out of alignment with reality, what would that be? I don't know if I addressed your question well enough. Was it close enough? Yeah, I was asked, did you talk about the developing of the path? The developing of the path. So the developing of the path is all the steps of the eightfold path, just for a shorthand to say it. So we have to cultivate our behavior, our way of being in the world to be wholesome, helpful. And the reason for that is so that our mind will be clear enough that when we meditate, we'll be able to settle the mind down, actually have some clarity about what's going on in the mind and the body.

And if we look at that carefully enough for long enough with some guidance, then what we'll gain is wisdom. We'll start to understand how things work. How does stress come



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

about? Is it really caused by those things outside that I thought were the problems or is stress somehow caused inside? And also an understanding of the end of dukkha. What does it mean to release stress? Does it mean that I finally bring an end to global capitalism? Is that what it's going to take for me to be free or happy? I can't be happy until that happens. Oh my gosh. And then we have to deal with all the concerns that come up because our mind is quite tangled.

So then it brings up things like, well, if I decide that I'm going to be happy without solving global capitalism, I'm just saying, it's all for me and everybody else the heck with it. That doesn't sound right either. So we have to work with all the views that come up around that. And this is all part of the path, this low clarification of how to be in this human existence without struggle, without struggle. Another word for dukkha is struggle, by the way. Even if stress doesn't quite work for you or suffering, how about struggle? Would you like to struggle less? Yeah.

Yeah. Great question. Catherine. My question is simple, but it's part of everything being aligned. I'm at that point and I like to have the words that you use, the Pali words clear in my mind. So I think I have Parinama, P-A-R-I-N-A-M-A.

Yeah, it has a V-I in front of it, V-Pari-Nama. Oh, thank you. That means change. That means change in the form of degradation change. Yeah. V-Pari-Nama.

Yeah. And the stress of everything is Samkara dukkha. Samkara dukkha. So that is, that's the stress of things, of constructions, things that are put together or built. And that's S-A-N-K-H-A-R-A. Thank you.

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you, Nancy, by the way, for. I noticed both of the questions came from people who are actually taking notes. I wish I had brought pen and paper. Are your words available after the class? Can you email them out? We are recording, so it will be available.

You'll be posted on Audiodharma. Thank you. Yeah. I also have pen and paper if you want. Almost every sutta is about dukkha or the end of dukkha. We could talk more about that specifically.

It's a large question. Yeah. Probably better just to go with the experience for this morning. Thank you. Yeah. Hi.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

Can you talk a little bit more about the end of dukkha, the cessation? I mean, I don't think you mean like we're not going to suffer at some point. Is it just to be okay with the suffering? What is cessation of dukkha really trying to get to? So the prospect of Buddhism is that, yes, we could not suffer anymore. And along the way, we have many flavors of understanding what, realizing what that means. And it becomes more and more an experience in the mind and body and heart. And in some ways what we have to learn to tolerate, we do have to learn to tolerate some of the stress that we feel in order to look at it clearly enough. So if we're in a state of reaction where any pain, any difficulty, we're reacting against it, angry about it, denying it, not able to see it, we won't be able to end it.

So in some sense, we do have to tolerate a little bit enough to see it, be with it. And the hope that we try to ignite in folks is that looking at it will lead to some resolution of it, but maybe not in the way we thought. Maybe not in the way we hoped initially, like, I just want that out of here. That has a virgin in it. So, yeah, it can end, but probably not in the way you think. I think in Gil's book, *A Monastery Within*, there's a very short, one of the tales is very short, and it says, Your problems will not be solved, they will be dissolved.

And I think that's pretty close. Yeah, Nancy. Thank you for all the wonderful words so far. The bit about alignment really struck me because I realize how much of my life I kind of, you know, want things to be in order, like things around me, like I want, you know, the family life, you know, what's happening with my kids or my family of origin, my parents, my siblings, you know, my work, the yard, like I want all of these things to be aligned, and kind of in some kind of order, and then I'll, you know, pay attention to myself once all of these things are orderly or something aligned is just such a great word. And I mean, I think I've come to realize over the years in practice that there's an alignment that can happen within that somehow, even though things are not really externally aligned, they appear more aligned than they would have before. And yeah, I mean, I guess it's not a question, it's more like an observation about that alignment bit and like where the alignment originates, maybe is an interesting question.

I guess maybe the first question is where does the misalignment originate? And I'm glad the term resonates. If any term does or doesn't resonate, that's okay, words are words, but I happen to like the word alignment a lot also, because it's a feeling, right? It's a sense of attunement or something like that. So I think this is worth pursuing in your practice if it feels like it works for you, because the sense of misalignment is somehow generated within. And that doesn't mean that nothing in the world needs to change and so forth, of course, of course. But it can be a clue as to when we're starting to bring in more suffering is when we start feeling that increasing misalignment. Yeah.

Yeah, I also really appreciated what was said today. And I guess I heard something in it and I sort of just want to say it to you and make sure I heard it right. It was kind of a



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

relief for me to hear you say, you know, it's from maybe from a Buddhist perspective, it's okay to adjust the conditions of one's life, because maybe I had the misunderstanding that if we were practicing correctly, everything would just be fine. And it seems to me like what a balanced life might look like is, you know, kind of adjusting the conditions and holding that lightly, and then working, you know, along the path to mature and the reduction of suffering. You know what I mean? It just feels like sometimes maybe the suffering is so intense that it or the discomfort is so intense, it just maybe makes sense to make some adjustments too. Sure.

External conditions are in some ways a reflection of what's going on inside, but they also support what's going on inside. There's a back and forth. And so yeah, definitely sometimes things just need to change. I remember Gil telling a story where, I know this isn't exactly what you're pointing toward, but there was a lawyer who said that he was sometimes asked to lie in his job and he wanted to also practice mindfulness. So he said, you know, how can I continue doing my job and where I lie and also, you know, follow this path, which includes the five precepts? And Gil said, you can't. So, you know, there are times when things need to be changed for one reason or another, various things.

That's definitely the case. Buddha never said it's going to be exactly how it is right now, but with no suffering. You know, there's a path to walk. But it's also true that those conditions, changing the external conditions we can see is not fully in our control. And so that can't be the end of the problem. But it is a back and forth.

Yeah. This one here and maybe that'll be the last one for now. Thanks. Thank you so much. So I was drawn to a couple of analogies. I need to work through analogies.

So one was trying to start something new and run something new. The other is a hamster on a wheel and the third is sailing. And the idea that came to mind is all of these have elements of dukkaduka, right, terror, fear, something, you know, that needs to get solved in order for this thing to take off. And it's a necessary but not sufficient condition, right? You know, something could be happening to the sails. The hamster could be, you know, hungry or tired or scared or whatever. Or, you know, you're whatever you're taking off is just, you know, it's painful.

And so the second that came to mind is in all of these situations, there's the flow state, right, where you're happy. Something's working well. You're running a big kitchen, you're sailing or whatever. And you're enjoying that piece. You're walking the path. You're doing something active.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

And then the third is, and this is the one that really struck me, I can't keep doing what I'm doing. I can't go back to what I was doing. And I, you know, and I can't change, right? And that could be, you know, the sailing's going to end, you know, the voyage, the flow, whatever you're in the restaurant you're running, you can't keep doing it, right? You hear about these people that run these extraordinary restaurants and then they just can't do it anymore because they're worried they're going to lose or whatever. And so there's a kind of balance between the active and the reflective that really struck me because it's sort of necessary. You can't just, even when it's going great, it's all consuming. And at the same time, you don't know what to do to get off the ride.

And maybe the last thing that came to mind is you just have to kind of enjoy the ride while you can. And if you're not enjoying the ride, figure out, you know, how to shift it, right? But, you know, because we often forget to enjoy the ride. And that to me is kind of the active part of walking the noble path, right? It's not being bored with the meditation, not being bored with the walking, not, you know, just kind of enjoying it because it's the, it's the way to sort of stay in some semblance of a balance between all of these forms of suffering, you know. Anyway, that's what came to mind, just a reflection. I don't know if that's made sense or not. Well, there is a role on the path for skillful enjoyment because the well-being, the state of well-being that we're in determines how clearly we can see, in a sense.

So that is important. But all of the analogies that you gave, I started feeling exhausted. And part of the understanding of dukkha is to really feel that exhaustion and see if there's something that comes from that. Our thinking mind says, oh, well, it has ideas about what that would be. But it can be useful, I think, if, as we go along, to really tune into how tiring it is to be thinking and doing nonstop. This is the suffering of creating conditions.

And if there might be some alternative to that. So we've been sitting for quite a while. So I think we should have a little break. But why don't we, I want you guys to have a chance to do some breakout groups and talk together. So why don't we try to come back at 10. 25 in eight minutes, if that's possible.

See you soon. Okay, so I wanted you to have a chance to talk among yourselves a little bit about this same question about the deepening of our understanding of dukkha, the changing understanding that we've developed over the course of the path. And the question is, how has your understanding of dukkha changed along the course of your path? And it would be great if each person could speak uninterrupted for a couple of minutes. And then you go to the next person and then when there's time at the end, could somebody in the group be in charge of timing two minutes per person? Somebody have a phone or something. And then any extra time you can interact. But how has your



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

understanding of dukkha changed along the course of your path? And so it would be just hear what other people have to say about that.

Okay, it sounded like that was a lot of fun to talk about dukkha. We never know. Okay, so is there anything that you'd like to share in the larger group of your wisdom about the changing understanding of dukkha? Yeah, over here. Something I just wanted to share that I just realized what you just had said. I think sharing dukkha, relating and connecting transforms the experience a little bit. And that was really nice to just have that realized that shift.

So yeah, I'm taking that back with me. Great. Thank you. Any other reflections? I guess I'll share what happened in my group. I noticed a trend of it was just all these things, the storm was happening outside of us. But we did what we could to rearrange the furniture to make us more comfortable to think of an analogy or read more books and get more furniture information, shall we say? So you were rearranging the deck chairs? Okay.

It's an enterprise we can do for a while. Okay. Well, I feel fairly trusting that. . . Let me just ask, did everybody find that your understanding of dukkha has shifted over the course of your practice? Yeah.

So it's not exactly the same as it was when you started. That's good. That's good. And it's worth taking that in and realizing that. Oh, yeah. Do you have a comment, Deborah? We should wait for the microphone.

Thank you for the delivery. One thing that has shifted, and I mentioned this in the group, is the relationship of dukkha, the relationship to dukkha, but more so dukkha inside and outside being, as you said, dissolvable but not able to cease. And its connection to self, the more there's a recognition of the construction and releasing of self, the more the relationship to dukkha changes. Beautifully said. Okay. That's all I want to say.

Thank you. Yeah. I mean, I just. . . I don't know how to explain that in the head because it's really been.

. . . It's changed the relationship to what I consider knowing as opposed to understanding. Yes. And I find that tears coming up because it's just the release that's possible is so. . .



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

. It's just remarkable. Thank you. Yeah. So, the more deeply we touch the dukkha because we're able and willing and have the capacity, the more deeply we can touch the release of dukkha. If you want the complete release, that's the price.

Here's the really deep touching of it. And we can trust that the path will take us into dukkha. If we're tuned to, you know, how it is that we are as we're going in, it will take us in at the rate that we can handle. So, you know, the head says, oh, no, you know, I don't. . .

I don't. . . I'm worried about just going into that. It's going to be too much. And it will be too much if you just ignore everything and plunge in.

But that's the nature of a path is that we unfold at each moment. We unfold a little bit more capacity through mindfulness practice to be with a little bit more. And then we can touch a little bit more release. And when the heart starts to get that that's how it works, then it can make its own path. So, that seems like a nice way to transition then. Thank you for your beautiful sharing, Debra, because it transitions us so nicely into teaching on the cessation, understanding the cessation, the release, the ending of dukkha.

So, that puts us on then to the third noble truth of realizing the cessation of dukkha. Remember, that was the task for the third. And here's what the Buddha said about the end or the cessation of dukkha, the third noble truth. This is from that same sutta that I quoted from before. Now this, bhikkhus, us, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized. So, craving is named as the thing that we're releasing and that the cessation of suffering comes when we release craving. And we think, well, craving, I mean, what is that exactly? That's kind of a technical thing. And, you know, why is craving, why is my craving related to the atrocities going on in the world? That's something to discover through the path. But let's start with the ending of suffering. I think sometimes we forget to notice the ending of suffering.

I mean, when one instance of dukkha ends, we're on to the next dukkha that's there. Okay, got rid of that one. Now what about this one? But did we notice the ending? Sometimes when you first ask people about, I mean, there are four noble truths and they all kind of stand together. And you ask about the third one, what do you know about the cessation of pain, the cessation of stress, the cessation of struggle. People feel a little bit blank. And that's partly because of the profundity that it's actually not really describable very well.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

But it's also because at a much more mundane level that we just don't notice it because it's kind of subtle. It's, you know, it's the ending. You know, we don't see the ending. We want to know what's here. So we're on to the next dukkha. But it's useful.

This truth asks us to linger in the ending of pain or suffering and to really get to know that feeling. And it might go against our habit to rest in feelings like contentment, ease, peace that are left when suffering ends. But that's the task. We're supposed to feel that. And so again, we'll see that our understanding of this refines over the course of practice. All of the forms of cessation, I'm now going to talk about a few different forms of how we might realize cessation of dukkha.

And again, all of them are related and they kind of intertwine. They aren't leveled out quite in the same way that dukkha is, where it gets more and more subtle. But maybe it does. But I'm going to draw out different nuances and facets so you can see these things in different ways. So I guess the first one is fairly blatant, which is maybe the first understanding of the cessation of dukkha that we have is the ending of something that was painful, the ending of something that was there and then it's not there. And we have ease or simplicity as the result of the ending of something.

So things do vanish, physical and mental experiences are there and then they do stop. I think everyone has noticed this. So even if it's something like anger, anger subsides, the pain does end sometimes in the body. A long day ends and I get into bed. The fly finally stops buzzing around my head. These things do end.

So sometimes change isn't suffering because what goes away is unpleasant. And then when we see the ending of painful physical states or objects and difficult emotions and mind states that have arisen in the wake of that, what do we feel? Usually it's some kind of ease, some kind of simplicity, or in the case of a unwholesome mind state ending, we may feel wholesomeness. We were feeling anger and then it goes away, we don't just feel neutral, we might actually feel some love or friendliness in the wake of this anger subsiding. So this top level of understanding cessation is about things, experiences, objects, appearances, and they're arising and ceasing. But as with the truth of dukkha, this top level understanding is not all of what the Buddha was pointing to. He wasn't just talking about the pain going away, which is good news because as we saw earlier, it doesn't all go away necessarily.

The Dharma goes deeper than that. So the Buddha had back pain when he got older. There are suttas where he'd been walking all day. He's an old man walking around India barefoot with a group of monks and he would get to a town and they'd be, you know, they're going to stay there for the night and the town people would come and they're expecting a Dharma talk and the Buddha would say to one of his other monks, you give



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

the Dharma talk, I'm going to lie down, my back hurts. So this is a great spiritual teacher but nearing the end of his life. So he wasn't free of back pain but he was free of the suffering from it.

I don't think the world that the Buddha lived in was all that ideal. It was a feudal society. Women weren't treated that well. The caste system was solidifying into place. Near the end of the Buddha's life, his family unit that he'd kind of grown up in his little, we call them clans but don't get the wrong name from that, the wrong idea. It was overrun by an expanding monarchy that was growing.

They came in and so, you know, the world wasn't perfect. All of that didn't go away. But the Buddha found the complete release from the struggle, the stress of that. So, you know, as we look more deeply, what is the deeper kind of cessation? And if it isn't just bad stuff, painful stuff going away? So, of course, you know, we're talking about nibbana. We're pointing toward nibbana, what the Buddha, this elusive term that the Buddha says is the goal of practice. Nibbana is famously difficult to talk about or understand conceptually.

But the deeper forms of understanding the end of dukkha begin to bring in some of the qualities of nibbana. You know, it's not like it's an all or nothing thing. We can start to appreciate some of the qualities that come with deeper peace quite early in the path. So, the second kind of understanding of cessation that I'd like to talk about then is cessation as absence. Not just the ending of a thing, but the absence itself. We may start to notice cessation as an absence.

It's not something that we normally notice, absence, because we're looking at objects. We're looking at things. We're even told to be mindful of things that are here, right? When we're sitting, we're supposed to know what's going on in the body, what's going on in the mind. We're continually pointing toward what's here, what's here, what's here. That's just so that we're not in the future in the past. But also, there are things that are not here.

And in particular, the cessation is a meaningful absence, a meaningful absence, if that makes sense. Often the analogy that Gil uses is he'll say, if you make your hand into a fist, and it gets kind of painful after five or ten minutes of this, much less five or ten decades of this, if you then, you can try it by the way, try making a fist if you want. And then when you release it, the absence of a fist has a feeling to it. It's an openness, a release. There's nothing there. It's not a thing.

A non-fist is not a thing that you can exactly see. But it is meaningful absence. And that's what we're talking about with the ending of dukkha. So this is not actually anything



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

obscure in the suttas. It's named right there in the Satipatana Sutta, which has the most explicit instructions for the cultivation of mindfulness. We see that, for example, in the third foundation of mindfulness on mindfulness of the mind, we are asked to notice when the mind is caught up in anger and when it isn't, when we're supposed to notice a mind that's characterized by lust or not.

Like, what does it feel like when your mind is not angry? Probably right now your mind is not angry. So what does non-anger feel like? And in the fourth foundation of mindfulness, we're also asked to notice that certain, like for example, that certain hindrances are not present and we're supposed to notice what conditions prevent them from re-arising. So we have a sense of absence and how to keep it that way. So it might be novel to observe your mind that's characterized by non-hate because we don't usually pay attention to that, but it's relevant. So the underlying motivation for attuning to absence is that we can attune to peace and ultimately to Nibbana, the supreme peace. Nibbana is defined as the absence of greed, the absence of hatred, and the absence of delusion.

That's the definition most commonly given in the suttas. So if you've never looked at absence, how will you recognize Nibbana, the ultimate absence? So this can be quite a revelation for us to think about cessation of suffering as an absence because an absence can accompany any experience, can't it? There can always be the absence of clinging, regardless of what objects are there. If you have an absence of clinging or an absence of craving, right there is a little bit of the essence of Nibbana. It might not be full, complete, or fully awakened freedom, but if we have an absence of clinging and we know that, that is a little taste of one of the qualities of Nibbana. So eventually we might come to feel some alignment to use that term we're using today with this very beautiful description of freedom. This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all assets, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbana.

It can mean that experience completely ends, but can we imagine that there could be an absence, a relinquishing of holding on, the relinquishing of all assets, no craving, even within experience, maybe. So then another way, so we have cessation as the ending of a thing, cessation as an absence, maybe we could even start to see cessation as nature. So another way to see this cessation of dukkha is to sense that it's actually an aspect of nature. There's something that seeks freedom the way water seeks the lowest point. This is getting quite profound, but can we imagine that? You know, why is it, of course we can put our scientific mind on and say, oh, it's gravity, but what's the gravitational pull of the heart that's not in the physical world? Where is your heart going toward? So this is captured, this idea is captured in a number of suttas, and there's one here that states explicitly that the path to Nibbana is a natural flow. I like this one, it's called the chetana sutta.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

So it starts out very practical, very real world tangible. It says, for a virtuous person, one whose behavior is virtuous, no volition need be exerted, let non-regret arise in me. It is natural that non-regret arises in a virtuous person, one whose behavior is virtuous. I don't think we have to be perfect to understand that when we are acting well enough in the world, we're not lying, we're not cheating, we're not stealing, we're not killing, it seems that that's the recipe for non-regret in a sense. That doesn't mean that everything we do is automatically golden and everybody loves us for it, that's bringing in a self and a view. But we can at least know that we are acting from that place, and if it's still something gets ruffled well, then we just work with that, clean it up, do what needs to be done.

But for one who has this kind of virtue in the heart, there's really no effort to feel non-regretful. But if so, it goes on. For one with how to regret, let no volition need be exerted, let gladness arise in me. It's natural that gladness arises in one without regret. If you had no regret about how you were living, wouldn't you be kind of glad about that? And for one who's glad, no volition need be exerted, let joy arise in me. It's natural that joy arises in one who is glad.

So these are getting into polyterminology, but what's the difference between gladness and joy? But joy is considered to be a little bit more internal, more settled, more related to the hindrances being at bay. And so then we've now moved from external action in the world, being virtuous, being ethical to an internal feeling. It's natural that when we're acting that way, we'll feel good in the heart. So then it takes an interesting turn. For one with a joyful mind, no volition need be exerted, let my body be tranquil. It is natural that the body of one who is joyful will be tranquil.

Oh, that's interesting. So we will calm down if we have this positive, this is wholesome joy, because we know earlier that we were in the state of ethical conduct. So we have a wholesome joy arising from that. This is the enjoyment that you might have been pointing toward earlier, but coming from wholesome activity, wholesome behavior. And so then there's natural to be tranquil. From that follows happiness, concentration, knowing and seeing things as they really are.

For one who is concentrated in mind, it's natural. Their no volition needs to be exerted to see things as they really are. So we can see that this clarity of vision, able to see how things work, able to see how suffering works, able to see how the end of suffering works comes about from the natural settling of the mind, goes on from there to disenchantment, dispassion. Those are not negative terms in Buddhism. They refer to no longer being fooled by the deceptions of the world. And then, for one who is no longer fooled, no volition needs to be exerted, let me realize the knowledge and vision of liberation.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

It's natural that one who sees that way will realize the knowledge and vision of liberation. So this pretty much says that we get on the wagon with virtuous behavior and we follow it down and down and down, like water seeking the lowest point. We arrive at the peace of liberation. The Sutta ends by saying thus, one stage flows into the next stage. One stage fills up the next stage for going from the near shore to the far shore. And that language means going from where we are here, stressed and unclear.

The far shore is the liberation of peace, calm, clear understanding. So we come to see that the end of suffering is something that gets initiated. We do have to bring something. If we don't do anything, we won't be liberated, probably. I think that's a fair statement. But if we bring forth what's needed at the beginning of the path, then there's some kind of a cascade that gets started.

We might have to steer a little bit and maybe occasionally paddle to keep going. But there's this kind of flow to the ocean. There's another Sutta that talks about when the rain falls on the mountain passes, then it fills up the lakes, fills up the rivers, and eventually fills up the great ocean. So another way to say this is that the mind has some kind of intrinsic or natural freedom that needs to be uncovered through the effort of practice. It's not that we're already awakened, but there's something that is going to be revealed through the proper effort of practice. This is a common way it's stated in the Thai forest tradition.

So here's a passage from Ajahn Chah. About this mind, in truth, there is nothing really wrong with it. Within itself it is already peaceful. That the mind is not peaceful these days is because it follows moods. The real mind doesn't have anything to it. It is simply an aspect of nature.

It is already unmoving and peaceful, really peaceful, just like a leaf which is still as long as no wind blows. If a wind comes up, the leaf flutters. The fluttering is due to those sense impressions, the mind following them. If it doesn't follow them, it doesn't flutter. We must train the mind to know those sense impressions and not get lost in them to make it peaceful. Just this is the aim of all this difficult practice.

We put ourselves through. Maybe we can start to sense that. What would it take to not follow all of those sense impressions and just be still? So there's a way in which we have two different views of the path through looking at this lens, these different ways of understanding how we could realize the cessation of suffering. One is a developmental path from here to there. We build up strength, we build more mindfulness, we cultivate concentration, we bring in the Brahma Viharas, we strengthen the mind and create it into something that is able to let go. That's a valid view.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

We do have to generate and cultivate something along the path. Then there's another view that says what we're doing is we're revealing, we're eliminating obscuration. There's something that's natural, something that's what the Buddha discovered was nature. But there's the work of clearing away what's in the way of that. I think they're in essence the same. They sound different when we talk about them, but they amount to the same thing.

These are some of the layers of realizing the cessation of dukkha, the fourth noble truth applied to the third noble truth. It's different though from maybe where we start with how do I get rid of this challenge in my life. That's great for bringing us to the path. Then we realize more and more, oh, this is actually where the problem is. It's not outside, it's inside, so then I need to let go of what's grasping inside. Then we come even to see that this release, this cessation, is different than what we thought.

Of course, it's different because the world we were living in that was generating all of that dukkha is not the world of the freedom that we eventually come to. We're going to have to change how we see things. So maybe I'll pause there and ask if you have any questions at this point. These are some layers of understanding the cessation of dukkha, which also shifts as we mature in practice. Yeah, over here. Thanks, Nancy.

So there's this craving and there are kind of two approaches. One is just sort of a general meditation practice where you're strengthening, and then the other is this virtuous life where the water flows downhill and good things flow from it. Are there specific meditations around craving and loss that go beyond the general? Oh, there are so many meditations. I'm not sure. I want to say, though, that both of them are going to include meditation. The natural flow was intended to evoke an image for you, but to do that path, it doesn't mean that there's no effort involved.

There is the effort of clearing away everything that has grown over this understanding of nature, this alignment with nature, all the tangle that has come in, which is ultimately created by our own mind. So either way, there's going to be virtuous conduct, meditation and wisdom. Those three elements always have to be there. And where would I find a meditation that deals with loss? With loss? What kind of loss do you mean? My son died two months ago, so it's grief. Yeah. So that is part of the very fundamental dukkha of being human.

It actually is what spurred, not the loss of his son, but the understanding that what the world deals with is aging, illness and death is what spurred the Buddha to find awakening. So it's a very profound, it's even called a heavenly messenger in our understanding. It doesn't feel very heavenly, but it can really open the heart. And the place to start is to really connect with your own heart and know to the degree possible



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

the sense of loss and connection, loss and love, how those somehow intertwine. I have a sense that that's a good place to start. Does that resonate a little bit? A little bit, but it's complicated because I think grief is the flip side of love.

Exactly. And so the deeper you love, the deeper the grief. So it's really kind of how do you stop that yearning? How do you keep the closeness and memory, but understand that they're gone and accept that? And then that's a struggle. Yeah. You've said it very beautifully, though, and I almost feel like the path is somehow to increase the space in the mind and heart so that it can hold all of that that you're feeling. That in itself is going to open a path toward toward the release of this very deep challenge that we have as humans, to have both of those, the love, the connection, the need to be with others, and the reality that every single connection eventually breaks either within lifetime or because one of the members dies, holding all of that, increasing the size of the heart so that it just encompasses all of that, I think is a good description of the path.

So meditations may be that open to space for you, spaciousness, because you already have a sense that there's something big that needs to be encompassed. And when we try to get small and figure it out or get narrowed in on one aspect of it, there's struggle there, big, big and vast. Yeah. And thank you for sharing that. I had a clarifying question about the third noble truth. The first one was ending, the ending of something, and the second one was absence of something.

What was the third one? Cessation as nature, as a natural process, maybe even built in in the way that I said suffering was built in. One more about, you said something about when you can't move forward, backward, and you can't sit still. But I didn't get the ending part of that. Well, that's when something interesting can happen. Thank you. Well, again, I'm looking for numbers and specifics.

The Sutta that you read that had a lot of joy in it, that name and or number of that Sutta would be helpful. That's Chaitanya Sutta on Aṅguttara Nikaya 10. 2. Which Nikaya? A. N. 2.

A. N. 10. 2. 10. 2.

You can send me an email about it later if you want. Okay, great. Okay, here's one over here, Nancy. Oh, was it ever first? Okay. As I'm sitting here today, I'm aware of the simplicity of the practice. And I know that the descriptions of it are very complex.

And when I began to sit, it was very helpful to just sit. It was very helpful to just do the practice and not think too much about it because I didn't know anything about it. I hadn't



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

read the suttas. I'm reminded of something that Gil said a couple of decades ago when I was. . .

I had just lost my best friend to death and then six months later, my father. And I also was really looking for some direction, something that was said about that that I could imagine. I was proceeding down the path of reconciling it. And he just said, you're doing the death and dying meditation. That's all there is to do. Just sit.

Just sit. Just sit. And I've just taken that with me all these years when I feel perplexed about what I could do more or what I could read more or all of that. And I don't harass myself with that anymore. I just get as simple as I can. It is very simple in the end.

And what was it that you said about something surprising coming up? Oh, that's. . . It's a different word you said. Something interesting or. .

. Interesting, yeah. Interesting. And that's been the experience I've had. Is it rarely have I known what was going to come up? And anyway, thank you for sharing. The way that you're unpacking this is really helpful.

Really helpful. The Dharma is often a surprise. Yeah. We have Nancy. I'm going to just interrupt for just a second with my own comment as I am so impressed that you had taken a vast subject in for a half day. It just feels enormous to me.

But there's just so much room to work in there. So I appreciate it. I really appreciate the time to meditate on absence. And what came to mind was at the end of a two-week retreat that was online, I kind of came out of that just not wanting to want and just feeling like, you know, a door had closed for me and I was trying to figure out like, you know, what am I going to do next? And how am I going to get back on track? Or I need to be on a track? What's that track going to be? And then I just didn't even want to want that. You know, I didn't want to feel like I needed to be a certain way or do a certain thing or be seen a certain way. And it was kind of like, wow, that's just such a different mode of being than I had really ever, ever experienced.

And, you know, it's kind of liberating and terrifying at the same time. And just becoming comfortable with the sense of not knowing is something I'm trying to take my time to do because it is very new experience to, you know, not have a plan or not even want to have a plan. What? So, yeah, it's kind of wonderful just to have the opportunity to think about, you know, the absence of those kind of wantings and other things that, you know, like you said, you tend to not maybe acknowledge them and just kind of move on to like the next, oh, what's the next thing I need to get over or whatever. So, yeah, thank



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

you. I really spend kind of, you know, lovely to have the opportunity to meditate on what's no longer there. And is this release of the realizing that you don't want to want is probably better than if you had gotten what you wanted, huh? Yeah, kind of in a way.

And someone just said something to me that I just thought was so beautiful. She said, you don't have to abandon who you are to let go of the story of who you are. And I just like was so like into the story. And yeah, I was like, wow, that's a great way to think about that, like the absence of a story. Exactly. I know we should find out who we'd be without the story.

Yeah, it's interesting. There is a teaching that says that when we see when we get a really clear glimpse of how things work, we become disenchanted with suffering. I thought that's a very interesting phrase. To what degree are we enchanted with suffering in certain ways? Yeah. Yeah, the ending of craving is actually what the freedom is. Not so much getting the thing that we want.

Go ahead. Yeah, so I'm new, fairly new at this, but that just seems so difficult to accomplish. You know, for example, I have little kids, it's hard not to want because they want. So you've got to, you know, you're in that I'm not by myself, you know, go into the woods and I'm living. Right. And part of it is for others.

And so that's really hard not to want, not to seek. So we need to distinguish different kinds of wanting. Sometimes the language is getting in the way. So, you know, normal desires, the desire for the welfare of others, the desire for our own welfare, these kinds of things are not unwholesome. They come with the territory of a human body and so forth. The craving that's referred to, and you can hear that craving sounds different than that, right? So the craving that's being referred to is the sticky kind of wanting that has an edge to it.

And that's the part that we want to kind of see more clearly. Where is that? What's the source of that? And at every level, can I let go of that? So it's fine to want food. We need to eat, but we don't need to crave the ice cream, you know, that kind of thing at that level. And then as we get more and more subtle, we can also see like the level of the story. I can still be me, but not have this fixed story about what that is. And then, you know, all the way down to maybe deeper levels at some point.

But it all unfolds quite naturally. That's a little bit why we'll spend a long time on that one about the water flowing downhill. I think we work wherever we're at. Whatever dukkha you're experiencing now is that that's it. That's the first noble truth. That's what we work with.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

And it's not that we should be having some other dukkha. That would be better. But, you know, we realize some kind of cessation of that. We just sit, as Debra said. We just sit with that, see what can happen, and something will shift. I don't know how the cessation of this particular dukkha that you have right now is going to come about.

It'll be a surprise. Maybe it will just end, because the situation changes. Great. Move on. Or maybe we'll have to realize, oh, I had a story about that. I had a view that isn't accurate.

And then we see a different way, and suddenly it doesn't look the same. Maybe it's the moment where that particular dukkha is going to be the letting go of that is the straw that when we pull it out, the whole structure collapses, and complete freedom comes from that. Who knows. But this dukkha right now is the one to be with, and it'll cease somehow. Okay, here's one more, and that'll be the last for a moment, because then we have a little bit more to do. Thank you.

That's a good question. Thank you. So one example of releasing and ending suffering, I think, in a very pointed way, is alcohol or drug dependency, where it's been described as an obsession with an allergy, right? So you just keep going after something that's obviously causing you harm. And you talk to people who are in 12 step programs or you read, and the relief that comes from being able to let, and they call it craving, being able to let the craving go and have your life start anew. And they say, look, you can't imagine how good life can be when you let go of this craving that's obviously causing us harm, right? And perhaps we don't have that as a direct sort of example in our life, but we can perhaps relate to that. And to me, that's very powerful, this idea that it is the absence of that craving for what at first was something pleasurable, something that we derived a lot of joy from, but became toxically allergic to.

And even, I mean, the Buddha talks about this, right? Intoxicants, and there's this tongue clear how much no intoxicants versus some intoxicants. But to me, that's a very clear and direct example of letting that go so that you can really start a new life. And so, anyway, I wanted to share. Thank you. Okay, great. So with that, let's do a short meditation to connect in with our understanding of the cessation of dukkha.

So getting yourself into it'll be relatively short, but a comfortable meditation posture and bringing your attention inward, letting some of the words and thoughts settle from what we've been thinking and talking about. Maybe taking a couple of long, slow, deep breaths. And on the exhale, just allowing the body to soften into an upright and relaxed posture. Call to mind a time when something that was painful or agitating went away. You felt relief or ease or peace from that. You know, an injury healed or an illness healed or some troubling situation actually resolved.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

How did that feel on your system? Sensing that positive sensation in the mind. And then also tune in now more generally to the state of your mind right now or your heart. Most likely, there's an absence of strong greed at this time. Sense the non-greed in the mind. Most likely, the mind is not completely overcome by hatred at this moment. And sense what it's like to have a relative absence of aversion at this moment.

Probably, your mind is not completely overcome by delusion at this moment. You're not totally out of touch with what's happening in the present moment. And how does it feel to have a relative absence of delusion? So a place that is relatively free of greed, hatred and delusion is a place that's close to nibbana in some sense. So, tune yourself to this meaningful absence. See if it's in some way nourishing to the mind and heart. And just breathing with that.

And then as just a short reflection, consider, do you practice with the inspiration that dukkha could completely end? What is your relationship to this goal of the Buddhist path? And whatever comes up is fine. So now I'd like to ask you just to it's just going to be for a few minutes to turn to somebody close to you and just in a dyad if there has to be one group of three that's okay. And just maybe each share one or two things that feel okay for you to share from that contemplation that we just did. How do you relate to this freedom? What was it like to notice a heart that doesn't have a lot of greed, hatred and delusion right now? Is that a sense of nourishment for you? Just whatever comes up and anything at a level that you feel you can share with the other person. So please just turn to someone else. It'll be a few minutes.

I'll ring the bell if you could each share something. Okay, good. That also sounded like a pretty interesting conversation. So I'm curious, is there anything that you wanted to, that you'd like to share with the larger group or any questions that came up from that? I just sometimes, this tends to come up with me around these kinds of conversations. I am doing the path, you know, as best as my understanding of it is. And sometimes when I kind of contemplate, like Nibbana or the end of suffering, what comes up for me a lot is not feeling so preoccupied with that and more preoccupied in how I show up for the world for other people.

And I get the sense that it's possible to end suffering and still not be awesome with other people, you know, like the awareness and emotional maturity and those kinds of things are also important. And sometimes I get the impression that those two things aren't necessarily intertwined. Like in, you know, for me, like just a kind of an understanding and tolerance for people are in all different places in their lives and have all different experiences. And sometimes how they may interact with me might be difficult for me. But no matter where I get on the path, just wanting to be there for people in some way. I don't know.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

That sounds beautiful. Yeah. Great. It's all good. Okay. Yeah, Amy.

Um, so I think, um, even after, you know, these years of learning the Dharma, I think somehow in my mind, I still have a concept of nirvana as being something like very deep and very profound and, um, like deeply peaceful and just something kind of almost otherworldly. And I think with this guided meditation, it's like you were just pointing that out like very something very simple and more accessible. Like just like right now I'm not super angry at anyone. I'm not super like craving or wanting anything. And how does that feel? Like, oh, well, you know, it's not particularly, uh, it's like a not super agitated state of mind. I mean, there are thoughts coming and going, but, um, like, and I think what, I don't know if this is true or not, but I think you're pointing like this is, this is a taste of it.

This is like a taste of what, um, nirvana might feel like. So, um, yeah, but it seems very ordinary at the same time. I don't know. It's the most ordinary, extraordinary thing. It's also, yeah, that is, that's right, is that we can partake of certain qualities and features of freedom all the time, you know, and it's often a matter of recognizing them. Remember this second kind of path is that it's already there, but we're not seeing it.

And we somehow have to clear it away. That means at any moment we could have a glimpse of it if the waters were to part. And so it's, um, it's a helpful view that, that's the idea that, yeah, it could actually just be, I mean, this is it, right? The six sense bases are the all. The Buddha said there's nothing besides seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, how could there be? And so, yeah, in a sense, it's right here. So we can go, I think, for a long time on all those elements, but I thank you for bringing that in and pointing out that there is an element of it that's ordinary and that we can touch even now. That's part of our deepening understanding of the cessation of dukkha is that it's not a lofty, transcendent, otherworldly.

It might be sometimes. Sometimes we feel it that way. And sometimes it's like, I'm sitting here and I don't feel a lot of greed, hatred, and delusion. Yeah, and that is a little taste. So we've seen today how our understanding of dukkha and the cessation of dukkha can shift over the course of walking our path. And so then we can bear in mind that actually our understanding of other dharma qualities could also shift, right? What about mindfulness? Our understanding of mindfulness starts out one way and then it changes as the path evolves.

Our understanding of compassion that we walk in the door with on the first day is one thing. And after 20 years of practice, I think our understanding of compassion is different. And after 40 or 60 years, yet different. Even ethics, I think, our understanding of that changes. What is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is . . .



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

. So that can change also. So we don't want to let ourselves be trapped in fixed concepts about the dharma. We have to learn the dharma. I don't think many of us, most of us, have to learn something about the dharma to walk the path. But our fixed ideas of it can also hinder at some point.

That's a trade-off, right? Or a shift. So allow things to flow and change and be willing to act differently if your understanding changes. This is a dynamic path. And part of the courage of the path is to actually act in line with what we understand. Can we manifest that if I see something differently? How do I have to be differently in the world to go with that? That's where it starts getting interesting. So it's good to check in from time to time on your practice.

I don't think too often. Maybe every five years. How about check in? Well, how is my understanding of what I'm doing in the world? We can do kind of a meditative reflection. Why am I practicing? What do I know about suffering? What do I know about the end of it? The way I am in the world, is that in line with that. Not every month, but every five years we or so don't take that too literally. We might want to reassess.

So it's said that the qualities of the dharma, six qualities, it's well expounded by the Buddha. It's visible here and now, timeless, inviting exploration, onward leading, and to be realized individually by the wise. So commoncy, that's the invitation of the dharma. And I very much am inspired to see so many here interested in that. And I have a lot of faith and delight in your ongoing path. So thank you for that.

And let me also say a few words about dana, just the kind of practical details of that. And then we'll dedicate the merit to finish our practice together. So this is as I said at the beginning, it's a sati center event. So the way the sati center does it is they have what's called one basket. There's just one donation and the teacher and the organization will both get some of that. And so you can give a cash or check made out to sati center and the dana box by the door, if that's how you want to do it.

And there's a label on there to remind you to put it to sati center. There's also a QR code there. And if you scan that on your phone, you can do credit card or PayPal and it will label it as being from this event today, the 23rd. And I think that's it. You can also go to the donate page on the sati center website sometime later if you want. But if you do that, please make it clear that the dana is for this event.

That's just really helpful. And then there's also out there a sign up sheet if you want to put your name to be on my email list. And my website is uncontrived. org, but you can sign off. I don't send very much, I promise. But if it's of interest, I think that's all the did I say everything I'm supposed to say Nancy? Is that anything else? Okay.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

Yeah. Okay, good. So then let's just consider that it's a blessing that we get to come together, especially now in person. But anytime we come together to share the dharma, there's a collective good that's generated from that. It's good for us all individually. And I think it gets amplified being together.

And we can just wish that really direct our mind toward the benefits of this practice being shared more broadly as we go out into the world. We'll encounter people on the streets, on the stores, at home when we get there, all the other people that this ripples out farther than we can really know, I think. And so just wishing that the benefits and the beauty of this practice be shared with all beings so that all beings may be happy, all beings may be peaceful, and all beings may find freedom from dukkha, may know the release of suffering. Thank you.



Sati Center for Buddhist Studies