



## Leigh Brasington - Dependent Origination & Emptiness 4 of 4

### **SPEAKERS**

Leigh Brasington

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### **Leigh Brasington**

Okay, so the next thing we're going to talk about is emptiness. And so the first question is, what does that mean? Things are empty of inherent existence, is the usual way of putting it. For the Buddha, things were empty of a self and what pertains to a self? So this is mine, except this is empty of mine. There's no real mine in here. It's just a convention that we have. It's the conventional truth. This is mine. It's not yours, it's mine. Right?

But it's empty of mine-ness on the absolute level. On the conventional level, it's mine. And on the conventional level, this is me. This is Leigh Brasington who lives in Oakland, California, I wrote two books, etc. But on the ultimate level, yeah, it's just the intersection of a bunch of SODAPI. We need to operate from both of those levels, when appropriate, and I'll talk about that in a minute or two or more.

So, emptiness for the Buddha was empty of self or what belongs to a self or what pertains to a self. But as time went on, emptiness was seen to have broader implications. And so we wind up with the Mahayana version of emptiness, which is best exemplified by the teachings of Nagarjuna.

Nagarjuna was an Indian born in South India to a Brahmin family. And by the time he was 20, he was recognized as a quite brilliant Brahmin scholar. However, he had a sensual side that was unfulfilled. And he and three friends learned from a sorcerer, how to make themselves invisible. And they went sneaking into the palace into the harem quarters. And well, let's just say when the King found out about it, he was most displeased. He had soldiers stationed behind the curtains and told them strike above the footprints in the carpet. When Nagarjuna and his friends returned, his three friends were killed. Nagarjuna was only able to survive by standing next to the king. He managed to flee the palace and headed for the hills.

He had discovered craving can lead to dukkha. So he began studying the teachings of the Buddha. It is said that in three months, he completely mastered the earlier teachings. And it was at this point, he met a monk from the Mahayana tradition. Mahayana Buddhism was just getting going at this point, beginning of the second century AD. And its view of the world, shall we say, from a more broadly interconnected viewpoint, very much appealed to Nagarjuna. This emphasis on compassion. And so he left his mountain hideaway and began traveling throughout India seeking other Mahayana teachings.



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He eventually started engaging Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike in debate, and defeated all comers. He founded an order and rules for his monks to live by, and eventually said "I have no master."

It was at that point some Nagas-Nagas are like, well they play the role of dragons in western mythology, but we have Nagas in India. They're like mythical sea serpents, except these Nagas lived in a lake. So lake serpents. And they recognize Nagarjuna's learning and they took him to the bed of a lake, where the Prajnaparamita Sutras had been stored. Now supposedly these were given by the Buddha. But people in the Buddha's time weren't sharp enough to fully understand them. So they had been entrusted to the Nagas until someone came along that was wise enough to be able to understand them. And the Nagas now thought that that was Nagarjuna.

He brought back these wisdom teachings and wrote commentaries on them, one of which is the Mulamadhyamakakarika, the Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way. It's quite a brilliant teaching and it seeks to elucidate emptiness. Now the story goes on to say that a king arranged for a contest of magic between Nagarjuna and a Brahmin scholar.

The Brahmin scholar created a giant lotus pond with a giant lotus in the middle, and seated himself on the lotus pond and mocked Nagarjuna for being stranded on dry land. Nagarjuna conjured up a white elephant, which waded into the lotus pond, grabbed the Brahmin scholar with his trunk and threw him back on dry land. The Brahmin scholar admitted defeat but wished that Nagarjuna were dead. Nagarjuna locked himself in his room. The next day, a worried disciple broke down the door, a cicada flew out, the room was empty.

Well, that's the official story. Make of it what you will. What we do know is that the author of the Mulamadhyamakakarika was an absolutely brilliant mind. Perhaps the most brilliant Buddhist teacher since the time of the Buddha. And as I said, his Mulamadhyamakakarika, his Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way, are an attempt to elucidate emptiness not by describing it directly, but in a more poetic fashion. And so there are three chapters in my book entitled The Middle Way. And they are discussions of a small part of the Mulamadhyamakakarika. So this is page 56 in the PDF, if you wanted to have a look. And if you don't have page numbers, this is the first of the three, the Middle Way chapters, this one is the Middle Way introduction to emptiness.

So what I want to do is share with you some of Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika. And as you'll see, if you glance through this chapter, you will see their translations. However, for this chapter, I'm not going to use the translations that you find in the book. The translations you find in the book are my translations. However, I don't know either Sanskrit or Tibetan. So these are translations of Stephen Batchelor's literal translation of the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit Mulamadhyamakakarika. So especially since I was doing the last bit of it, there could have been something lost in the translation. So I'm gonna go back to Stephen Batchelor's actual poetic translation from his book, Verses From the Center--which, if you're interested in studying Nagarjuna, this is the place to start. It's not a literal translation. It's an approachable translation. Stephen did a really good job of capturing what Nagarjuna was saying in a way that is more



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poetic of what Nagarjuna had to say. So, the first one I want to share with you Stephen entitled "Walking".

"I do not walk between the step already taken and the one I'm yet to take, which both are motionless. Is walking not the motion between one step and the next? What moves between them? Could I not move as I walk? If I move when I walk, there would be two motions: one moving me and one moving my feet. Two of us stroll by. There is no walking without walkers, and no walkers without walking. Can I say that walkers walk? Couldn't I say they don't? Walking does not start in steps taken or to come, or in the act itself. Where does it begin? Before I raise a foot is there motion, a step taken or to come whence walking could begin? What has gone, what moves, what is to come? Can I speak of walkers when neither walking, steps taken, nor to come, ever end? Were walking and walker one, I would be unable to tell them apart. Were they different, there would be walkers who do not walk. These moving feet reveal a walker, but did not start him on his way. There was no walker prior to departure. Who was going where?

So what Nagarjuna is pointing to is the fact that walking and walkers are inseparable. You can't have a walker, unless there's some walking. And you can't have walking unless there's somebody doing that walking, a walker. Were walking and walker one, I would have been unable to tell them apart. Were they different, there would be walkers who do not walk. So the concept of a walker is not the same as the concept of walking. And yet each relies on the other. Neither of them has inherent existence. And this is what is meant in the Tibetan. Or in the Mahayana, about emptiness. Things are empty of inherent existence, they don't stand alone. It's not possible to have a walker, just be a walker, without having some walking. So a walker is dependent upon the action of walking and the action of walking is dependent upon there being somebody there to do the walking. And as we'll see, it's going to turn out that everything is empty of inherent existence. Everything arises dependent on other things.

The next one is entitled "Seeing": "If my eyes cannot see themselves, how can they see something else? Are there no traces of something seen? How can I see it all? Neither seeing nor unseeing. See, seeing reveals a seer who is neither detached nor un-detached from seeing. How could you see and what would you see in the absence of a seer? Just as a child is born from mother and father, so consciousness springs from eyes in colorful shapes. Without these eyes, how could I know? Consciousness, contact, vedana, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, aging and death. Seers seeing sight. Explain, hearers hearing sounds. Smellers smelling smells. Tasters tasting tastes. Touchers touching textures. Thinkers thinking thoughts."

So seeing reveals a seer who's neither detached, nor un-detached from seeing. So just like walking, you don't have a seer who's not seeing, and you don't have seeing unless you have somebody who is seeing called a seer. Both of these are empty, both of these are dependent, neither has inherent existence.

The next one is "Body": "I have no body apart from parts which form it. I know no parts apart from a body. A body with no parts would be unformed. A part of my body apart from my body would be absurd. Were the body here or not, it would be no parts. Partless bodies are pointless. Do not get stuck in the body. I cannot say my body is like its parts. I cannot say it's something



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else. Feelings, conceptions, drives, minds, things, are like this body in every way. Conflict with emptiness is no conflict, objections to emptiness, no objections."

So your body is made up of parts, right? You have the fingers of your left hand, and you have the fingers of your right hand and you have your eyeballs and your nose and your feet and your heart and your lungs and your liver, and there's a lot of parts there. So your body is not the same as its parts. But it's not different from your parts. I cannot say my body is like its parts. I cannot say it's something else.

Think about it. You go get a haircut. You walk in and it's your hair. Half an hour later, you look at the floor. Oh, no part of me is on the floor! You have that reaction? No. But but when you came in it was you and that was on the floor and it's just trash. How did that happen? Or you clip your fingernails? Right? They were you and now they're in the garbage. You went from being you to not you.

Or what if you lost a valuable part of your body? Let's not do that, it's too gross. Think about your red Corvette. I assume all of you have a red Corvette? Yes? Okay, good. So you have your red Corvette. What if you remove one of the wheels? Is it still a red Corvette? What if you remove all four wheels? Is it still a red Corvette? What if you remove the steering wheel and all four wheels? What if you take out the seats and drop the engine? Pull the transmission? Remove the differential? What if you unscrew everything that can be unscrewed and you lay out all the parts? Is it still a red Corvette? Or is it just a pile of parts? And if it's just a pile of parts, where did the red Corvette go? At what point when you were taking off the parts did it stop being a red Corvette and just become a pile of parts? And when it stopped being a red Corvette, where did the red Corvette go?

Your body is just like that in every way. Only, we don't have interchangeable parts. Right? The red Corvette is empty of red Corvette-ness. It's just a pile of parts. Your body is empty of you-ness. It's just a pile of parts all set. And just like the red Corvette, it's nothing but the intersection of a bunch of streams of dependently arising processes interacting. That's all that's going on. So your red Corvette is empty, just like you were empty. It doesn't have an essence in it. It's just an assemblage of a bunch of stuff that we give this concept red Corvette to, or this concept of me to. But in both cases, it's nothing but SODAPI.

The next of these that I want to take a look at is entitled "Self". And that's in the next chapter in my book. Let's see, that appears on page 60. And if you want to read along, I did actually take Stephen Batchelor's translation included in the book. I did my own translations of the previous because I couldn't exceed fair use for how much I included in the book because they wanted more money to include everything than I was going to get in my advance for writing the book, if I went with a publisher. So I just could only use fair use. So yeah, you get one of Stephen's best translations.

All right. So, "Self": "Were mind and matter me, I would come and go like them. If I were something else, they would say nothing about me. What is mine when there is no me? Were self-centeredness eased, I would not think of me and mine. There would be no one there to



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think them. What is inside is me, what is outside is mine. When these thoughts end, compulsion stops, repetition ceases. Freedom dawns.

"Papañca spawns thoughts that provoke compulsive acts. Emptiness stops papañca. Buddhas speak of self and also teach not-self. And also say there's nothing which is either self or not. When things dissolve, there's nothing left to say. The unborn and unceasing are already free. The Buddha said it is real, it is unreal, it is both real and unreal. And it's neither one nor the other. It is all at ease, unconceivable by your papañca, incommunicable, inconceivable, indivisible.

"You are not the same as or different from conditions on which you depend. You are neither severed from nor forever fused with them. This is the deathless teaching of Buddhas who care for the world. When Buddhas don't appear, and their followers have gone, the wisdom of awakening bursts forth by itself."

This might be worth going through a second time: "Were mind and matter me, I would come and go like them. If I were something else, they would say nothing about me." So if you are your body and mind, well, they say you change out all of your cells every seven years. I mean, you got almost nothing left from the point when you were born. Maybe there's a couple atoms hanging around. But yeah, it's all changed. Does that mean you're somebody different?

And your mind, you change your mind all the time. Do you become somebody else every time you change your mind? Yet, your body and your mind do say a lot about "me". Right? But this is in a conventional sense. But in an ultimate sense, they're just, well, more SODAPI. What is mine when there is no me?

This is the Buddha's strategy for getting out of dukkha. Right? You're to investigate anicca-dukkha-anatta till the point where you can actually uproot that sense of self. This is one of the last fetters to go at the fourth stage of awakening. It's usually translated as "conceit", but better would be "conceiving of the self". Because if you don't conceive of the self, then there's nobody there to crave. There can't be a thought of "I want to get that." "I want to get that" implies somebody who's gonna get it. Now the same thing with clinging, there's nobody there to think "I have this." Because if there's nobody, there's nobody to own it.

"What is mine when there is no me? Were self-centeredness eased, I would not think of me and mine. There would be no one there to think them." So the Buddha is basically saying, try and look at the world from a less egocentric perspective and get a real sense of what's going on. If you can get enough insight from that direction, a real sense of the world from the non-egocentric perspective, then maybe you can let go enough to actually let go of the sense of self and get free of dukkha. "What is inside is me, what is outside is mine. When these thoughts end, compulsion stops, repetition ceases, freedom dawns."

All the compulsions that we have? Yeah, it's me behind those compulsions. I gotta get this, I gotta get rid of this. Whatever it is, it's I. Repetition, I got to do it again. I got to do it. Yeah, I. As that stops, freedom dawns. Papañca spawns thoughts that provoke compulsive acts. You can keep your rotten potatoes! Emptiness stops papañca. Once you really begin to not just



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understand but experience the empty nature of reality, you're far less likely to get carried away into papañca.

"Buddhas speak of self and also teach not-self and also say there's nothing which is either self or not. So when the Buddha's teaching the brahmavihāras, he's speaking of self. One should give mettā to all as to oneself. And so there are selves there. But other times he teaches not-self.

If you remember the so called second discourse, the discourse on not-self, he asked his five ascetic friends, is body self? Well, it's impermanent, it's dukkha, no that's not going to work. And then the same for each of the other aggregates. They're all not-self. And so he's teaching not-self. And he also teaches there is nothing which is either self or not.

To me, the most profound sutta in the whole of the canon is Samyutta 12-15, Kaccānagottasutta. In that Sutta, Venerable Kaccānagotta comes to the Buddha and wants to know right view, what is right view? The Buddha says, this world for the most part depends upon a duality, upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence. Or actually literally the notion of it is and the notion of it is not. But when one sees the arising of the world as it actually is with correct wisdom, one does not think in terms of non-existence. And when one sees the ceasing of the world as it actually is with correct wisdom, one doesn't think in terms of existence.

This world is caught up in views and opinions and ideas. One with right view does not get caught in views and opinions. One who has right view does not take a stand about my self, my soul, my atta. Right? The Buddha's saying, if you can see the world not in terms of existence and non-existence, then you won't take a stand saying, I exist or I don't exist. I have a self, I don't have a self. People ask the Buddha, once and for all, is there a self? He wouldn't answer. Is there no self? He wouldn't answer.

He said that if he said there was a self, that would be the mistake of eternalism. And if he said there was no self, well, that would be the mistake of annihilationism. Better not to say anything. Because that would just get people more confused. They needed to practice more.

So what the Buddha is basically saying is if you really get this dependent origination thing, you don't think in terms of existence. You don't think in terms of non existence. You think in terms of SODAPI, is how I would phrase it. He says that one with right view sees that when there's an arising, it's only dukkha arising. And when there's a ceasing, there's only dukkha ceasing.

When I first read that, it was like, what? That chocolate cake that arose the other day, that wasn't too good, that was really good. I wish I had some more, it's all gone. And that headache that I had, when it went away when it sees that was not dukkha hope it doesn't come back. So the thing is to realize that nothing is going to give you lasting happiness. When there is arising, what's arising is not going to give you lasting happiness. And when there's a ceasing, what ceasing also wasn't going to give you lasting happiness. The chocolate cake ceased, no lasting happiness. The headaches ceased, that's happiness, but it might come back. So, no lasting happiness. Another translation for dukkha would be "not a source of lasting happiness."



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"Everything exists, this is one extreme. Nothing exists. This is the other extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathagatha teaches the dhamma via the middle. With this as necessary condition, that arises. If this doesn't happen, that does not arise."

Now if you look at the sutta, you'll find that it actually says something slightly different. It gives the 12 links of dependent origination and the forward arising order and the forward ceasing order. I suspect that was a later addition. It doesn't really make any sense. And, turns out I found some scholars that are saying the same thing. Govind Pande says that in his *Studies in the Origin of Buddhism*, and he quotes Carolyn Rhys Davids for saying the same thing. What I suspected all along that it said was something like this-that conditionality dependent origination. And then somebody sent me the Chinese version of that sutta. And guess what it says? This-that conditionality dependent origination. And then hence the 12 links.

But anyhow, the sutta is not about a self or there not being a self: "is neither a self or not." There's just, well, streams of dependently arising processes interacting. "When things dissolve, there's nothing left to say. The unborn and unceasing are already free."

We go around thing-ifying the world. It's a water glass, right? Obviously a water glass, it's got water in it and it's glass. You just thing-ified this. It's just some pixels. That's all that's happening. You're seeing some colored pixels, and you're making it into a water glass. We do that with everything we conceptualize it: *sañña*.

Can you experience the world prior to *sañña*? This is the advice to Bahiā. Remember, Bahiā came to the Buddha wanted some teaching when the Buddha was on an alms round. And the Buddha said to him in seeing let there just be seeing and hearing just hearing and sensing just sensing, cognizing just cognizing. When you can do that Bahiā, there's no you in that, there's no you in this. Just this is the end of dukkha.

Well, that was enough for Bahiā to become fully awakened. It was a play on the teaching in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that the Buddha knew that Bahiā was following because he was Bahiā of the barkcloth, he was dressed like a tree. Which is what the followers of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* wore.

It's very important to remember the Buddha wasn't doing consistent metaphysics. He wasn't doing metaphysics at all metaphysics is trying to explain how reality is, what it's like. Buddha said repeatedly, I teach only dukkha and the end of dukkha. And so it depended on to whom he was speaking, what he had to say. And so sometimes he would say it's real. And sometimes he'd say it's not real. Sometimes he'd say it's both. Sometimes he would say it's neither. But it depended on his listener. What the Buddha was teaching was what he felt people needed to learn, so that they could practice effectively.

"But in seeing, let there just be seeing." Don't see objects, can you just see seeing? "When things dissolve, there's nothing left to say. The unborn and unceasing are already free." If you don't get born, you don't die, right? If you don't go around giving birth to things, they're not going to cease. Right? There's just the visual field. It's all free already. The Buddha said it is real and it is unreal and is both real and unreal and it's neither one nor the other.



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Now, indeed, there is such a thing as Buddhist metaphysics. It's a big deal in the Abhidhamma and the commentaries, but it's not from the Buddha. It's from taking what the Buddha taught and converting it into metaphysics. The Buddha was, well if you want to give him a title, a phenomenologist. He was studying phenomena and how we respond to it. The way out of dukkha--don't respond with craving and clinging when you have pleasant or unpleasant vedanā. Okay, that's not metaphysics. That's the way out of dukkha. It's all at ease. No amount of papañca is gonna put it at ease. It's incommunicable, inconceivable, indivisible.

The universe is as it is, it's just there. But it's too big for our little pea brains to handle. So we need to chop it up into bits and pieces to be able to find things to eat and a place to live, etc. But this is our conventional approach to staying alive, but it's not what's actually there. What's actually there is incommunicable, inconceivable, indivisible.

Remember, I said there were only verbs? Nouns were just slow-moving verbs? Truth be told, there's only one verb: unfolding. We could say the universe is unfolding. But "the universe" is superfluous. There's just unfolding. That's all that's happening. But that's a little too much for our pea brains to take in. So we need to chop it up into bits and pieces to find something to eat, and something to wear and some place to live, etc.

But at the ultimate level, it's indivisible. It's all interconnected in ways that aren't readily apparent. It's inconceivable. There is no concept that's going to give you an accurate picture of what's going on. And incommunicable. All I can do is sort of be the finger pointing at the moon, and hope that you don't start looking at fingernail polish or rings or something like that. So yes, a good teacher can point you in the direction. But you're going to have to get there yourself. Because it's incommunicable, inconceivable, indivisible.

"You are not the same as or different from conditions on which you depend. You are neither severed from nor forever fused with them. This is the deathless teaching of Buddhas who care for the world." Those six lines right there are more of the source of SODAPI than anything else I've studied. "You are not the same as or different from the conditions on which you depend. You're neither severed from nor forever fused with them."

So what did you have for lunch? Did you have some lettuce, maybe? So you're not that lettuce. But you're not separate from that lettuce. Right? It's become part of you, but you're not forever fused with it. Yet you're not severed from it. The fact that you ate your lunch today has had an effect on who you are, how your brain works and how your body works. "You're not the same is nor different from the conditions on which you depend. You're neither severed from them, nor forever fused with them. This is the deathless teaching of Buddhas who care for the world." This is SODAPI. This is dependent origination.

"When Buddhas don't appear and their followers are gone, the wisdom of awakening bursts forth by itself." You don't need the Buddha to explain this to you. You don't need the Buddha's followers to explain this to you. But it's really hard to see. But if you look carefully, you can see this for yourself. I would have never seen it without the Buddha and his followers pointing me in this direction. I really needed their help. I wouldn't have gotten here otherwise. But it's there for



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anyone to see who looks carefully. It's really nice that there are those who can teach us where to look and how to look so that we can see all this stuff.

Okay, the next one that I want to share with you, is entitled, well, it's entitled "Awakening" by Stephen Batchelor. It's often titled "The Four Noble Truths." That's the next chapter in my book, which starts on page 63. Again, this is a different translation. This translation comes from Jay Garfield, and his Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, which is a more literal translation. It has a really good commentary. I would suggest you read Stephen Batchelor's "Verses from the Center" multiple times before you tackle Garfield. Garfield is a little difficult. But yeah reading them both will take you a long ways. But I'm gonna go with Stephen Batchelor's translation to start with.

So this particular chapter in the Mulamadhyamakakarika starts with an imaginary opponent, giving Nagarjuna, saying basically you're corrupting the dharma by teaching your emptiness. Because this opponent thinks that emptiness is equivalent to nihilism. If something is empty, it means it doesn't exist. This is a very common mistake. Please do not make that mistake. It just means it's empty of inherent existence, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

So, "If everything is empty, there would be no rising and passing, ennobling truths would not exist. There would be no understanding, letting go, cultivating, realizing. Without tasting the fruits of practice there would be no sangha. With no truths, no dharma either. With no sangha and dharma, how could you awaken? Talk of emptiness maligns what is of value. Absent fruits, good and evil, conventions fall apart.

"Nagarjuna replies, not knowing emptiness, the need for it or the point of it, you subvert it. The dharma taught by Buddhas hinges on two truths: partial truths of the world, and truths which are sublime. Without knowing how they differ, you cannot know the deep. Without relying on conventions, you cannot disclose the sublime. Without intuiting the sublime, you cannot experience freedom."

So, the dharma taught by Buddhas hinges on two truths. This is one of the early elucidations of the doctrine of the two truths. It doesn't show up per se in the suttas, there are hints of it. The closest you'll come to finding the two truths probably is at the end of Digha Nikaya number nine, the Potthapada Sutta. There the Buddha says, "a tathagatha (a fully realized one) can use these words--I, me, mine--and not be fooled by them."

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So a fully awakened person can use the conventional terms, the concepts from our conventional reality, but not be fooled by them. The first time that the doctrine of the two truths showed up in Buddhism, as far as I know, is the questions of King Milinda. King Milinda was one of the Greek kings left behind by Alexander the Great's army in Afghanistan. And at that time, Afghanistan was a Buddhist country. Remember when the Taliban blew up those very tall statues of the Buddha? Yeah, that was Buddhism from the time after Alexander the Great when there was Buddhism in Afghanistan.



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And so King Milinda asked a bunch of questions to an enlightened monk named Nāgasena. And what shows up in there is the first teaching on the two truths. Here it says "partial truths of the world and truths which are sublime." The actual literal Sanskrit says, "truths that don't fully reveal and truths which are sublime."

So the truth is, this is my phone, right? It's not your phone, it's my phone. But that doesn't fully reveal what's going on. It doesn't fully reveal the dead dinosaurs to make the plastic or the sand that was dug up to make the silicone, or the minerals that were mined, the metals that were mined and the sweatshop in China where they assembled it, and whoever wrote the software and all the rest that went into it. So when I say it's my phone on an individual level that's true but it doesn't fully reveal what's going on.

And that's the case for all the conventional truths. Anytime you say me or mine, on the conventional level, yeah, it's you. I'm the one giving the talk right now. It's not you. Conventionally that's true. But this talk is actually coming to you as a result of a whole bunch of SODAPI. The practice that I've done, the dharma talks I've heard, the books I've read, the discussions I've had with my noble friends when we were having noble conversations. All that's what's feeding into it. I'm just the mouthpiece trying to express what the Buddha expressed. Hopefully, I'm doing a reasonably good job of it. But me, that's only convention.

And then truths which are sublime. Truths that are inconceivable, incommunicable, it's just a little bit more than we can express with our conventions. "Without knowing how they differ, you cannot know the deep. Without relying on conventions, you cannot disclose the sublime." So the ultimate truths, the non-conventional truths of the world do need to be disclosed. But just like you can't take somebody's hand and put it up against the moon and say now do you understand the moon, you just have to point. And so that's what Nagarjuna is doing. That's what the Buddha was doing. That's what I'm trying to do, is point you at these ultimate truths, these truths beyond our conventional way of accessing the world. Why? Without intuiting, the sublime you cannot experience freedom. The only way out of the dukkha is to gain an understanding of the world from the ultimate perspective. The relative perspective, no matter how accurately you get it, is not going to set you free.

Now, it's talked about as two truths. I prefer to talk about it as two perspectives, truths seen from two different perspectives. So if I had a bowl here, just a regular ordinary soup bowl, is it concave or convex? What do you think, concave or convex? I mean, those are opposites. It can't be both right? Well, no, it's actually both. It depends on your perspective. And it's very important to pick the proper perspective. If you want to pour some soup into your soup bowl, you better take the concave perspective. Otherwise, you're going to have a mess. If you want to elevate a tea candle it's probably going to work better if you use a convex perspective. It's really important to understand both perspectives.

Often when people begin to get hints of the ultimate perspective, they want to throw away the relative perspective, the conventional world. Won't work. You can't cross the street from the ultimate perspective. You get to the corner, you look down there, you see a bus coming and go, "it's empty." You step in front of it, you're dead. It's not going to work. There are times when it's absolutely necessary to operate from the conventional perspective. When you're eating your



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peanut butter and jelly sandwich, it's very important you eat the sandwich and not your fingers. Right? When the Buddha was eating his food, he was fully awakened. He never ate his fingers. He only ate the food. So the relative perspective doesn't go away.

But it doesn't fully explain what's going on. You need to be able to look from the ultimate perspective. And what you see from that perspective, well you see SODAPI. You see dependent origination. You see it's inconceivable, indivisible, incommunicable. But it has to be understood. Because that's where you find freedom. That's the perspective that is going to enable you to let go of that selfing. And when you let go of that selfing that's where you're going to find your freedom.

"Misperceiving emptiness injures the unintelligent like mishandling a snake or mis-casting a spell. The Buddha despaired of teaching the dharma, knowing it hard to intuit its steps. Your muddled conclusions do not affect emptiness. Your denial of emptiness does not affect me."

You could see where Nagarjuna would be pretty tough in the debate. Right? "Your muddled conclusions." It's like picking up a snake by the tail and expecting not to get bitten. Doesn't work.

"When emptiness is possible, everything is possible. Were emptiness impossible, nothing would be possible." The fact that everything is dependently originated processes means that they're changeable. It's all changing all the time. If something had an essence, an implication of that would be that it wouldn't change. Right? I mean, it's a water glass. And if it had an essence of water glass, I could drop it on the floor, and it wouldn't break. Because it has an essence of water glass, and the essence means it's in there and it's not gonna go away. You drop it on the floor, it's gonna break.

So, if things had essences, they would be locked in that way. If you had an essence, when you got it, you better hope you were in a good mood, because that's where you're going to be stuck forever. Right?

"In projecting your faults onto me, you forget the horse you are riding." So this is a story about a man who had two dozen horses. And he went out one morning to count his horses. So he mounted up on one. And he rode around counting "1, 2, 3...22, 23...Oh, no, one of my horses is missing. Somebody's stolen one of my horses," forgetting the horse he was riding. Remember, the Buddha despaired of teaching because he didn't think people would get it. They had too much dust in their eyes.

So what Nagarjuna basically is saying to his opponent is "you got too much dust in your eyes, Mr. opponent. You forget the horse you're riding. "To see things existing by nature is to see them without causes and conditions, thus subverting causality, agents, tools and acts, starting, stopping and ripening."

So if you impute an essence to anything, you just froze it. And furthermore, you assume it's been like that since beginningless time. Nothing has an essence. It's all dependently originated. And then what most scholars consider the heart of the Mulamadhyamakakarika: "Dependent



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origination is emptiness, which dependently configured is the middle way. Everything is dependently originated, everything is empty."

So when you hear teachings on emptiness, you're hearing teachings on dependent origination. It's just another perspective on the same thing. Everything is empty because everything is dependently originated. And furthermore, this translation here doesn't really bring it out. But emptiness also is empty. It's just another concept that we're using to try and help you understand what's going on. Don't make a big deal about emptiness. It too is empty. It's a dependently originated phenomenon, it's as empty as everything else.

There's a lot more to say about emptiness, but I'm going to share one more thing from Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika. This comes from the next chapter, which is entitled "Nirvana." This is something that gets people all wound up when they hear it.

"Samsara is no different from nirvāna, nirvāna no different from samsara. Samsara's horizons are nirvāna's. The two are exactly the same." What this is saying is that this right here, this is samsāra, if you look at it with the eyes of craving and clinging. And this right here is nirvāna, if you look at it with the eyes of a Buddha. Nirvana is not some place, some faraway heaven for arahants or anything like that. It's right here right now, if you can process your input in a way that doesn't lead to craving and clinging.

In fact, the whole idea of conceiving of nirvāna, nibbāna, however you want to do it--nibbāna is Pāli and nirvāna is Sanskrit as--having ontological existence as being a place that you can get to or something like that. Well, it's got a serious problem because we know that nibbāna is unchanging. And if you ain't in nibbāna right now, you ain't gonna get in because it ain't gonna change to let you in. You better hope it doesn't have ontological existence. Nibbāna is a realization. It's a realization of the nature of reality that's so profound that it uproots all of your tendencies to craving and clinging. It's not a place or a thing. It's a realization. And it to, yep, it's dependently originated based on your practice. That's why we practice.

All right. So it's with a fair amount of angst, I say, any questions? Patrice. You're still muted.

## **Attendee question**

Thank you, thank you for this. It's been great. This is gonna sound like a stupid question, but I can't seem to get it out my mind. So if I have no essence, which I can accept, I go to kamma. Then how do we explain kamma? How can there be kamma?

## **Leigh Brasington**

Okay, so the Buddha's teachings on kamma, basically, is pay attention to what you're about to do. Actions have consequences. Kamma means action, that's what it means. Now, at the time of the Buddha, spiritual kamma was ritual action. For example, if you were a farmer, and you want to have good harvest, then you better get the gods on your side. But to do that, you had to perform ritual action. But you didn't know how to perform the ritual action because you were a farmer. But luckily for you down the road, there was some priest who for a modest fee would perform the ritual kamma, the ritual action for you to engage your harvest. And the Buddha



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goes, no karma, I declare, oh, monks, is intention. In other words, pay attention to what you're about to do, it's going to have consequences. That's what his teaching is primarily about.

Now we do find in the suttas where the Buddha is using previous actions to explain why bad things happen to good people, or why good things happen to bad people. That's in the suttas. But is this just skillful means? Or was it inserted later? I don't know. But the teachings on kamma are about paying attention to what you're considering doing, it's going to have consequences.

What people want to do with kamma is balance the books, right? They want to say, okay, this person did an evil thing. So they're going to have something evil come back to them. But that's personal. That's on the relative level. And we were just talking about, you know, when you get really down to it, the person sort of disappears. Think about, one of the most recent evil actions done, not this year but not too long ago, was the invasion of Iraq. That was really bad kamma. Really bad karma. Really bad action. It resulted in the death of somewhere between 100,000 and a million Iraqis. And it left how many millions of Iraqis with PTSD and how many of the soldiers that went there with PTSD. And it led to the rise of ISIS. And I mean, we could go on with all the really unwholesome, unhelpful results of that action. Yes, those guys that actually did the action, they seem like they got away with it. And I don't like that. But when you start looking at the bigger picture, no, nobody got away with anything. It was a very unwholesome action and it caused a whole lot of problems for a whole lot of people. We want to make it personal, but the Buddha is pointing out that, well, turns out were much more interconnected than it appears on the surface. Right? So yeah, realize that every action you do is going to have results that depend on what's going on there. And it's going to affect more than you.

Let me read you something. This is from the last chapter of my book, which is actually entitled, "Don't Be Fooled by your Conceptualizing": "A human being is a part of a whole called by us 'a universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion, not to nourish the delusion, but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the unattainable measure of peace of mind." That's from Albert Einstein. He was a smart guy.

So karma, kamma, is about paying attention to what you're about to do. It's going to have results. But the Buddha said, don't try and figure out the threads of karma, it will lead to either madness or great vexation. So just pay attention to what you're about to do. Does this address at all your question?

## **Attendee question**

it does. There's still a little bit more. If I hear you correctly, you're saying there really isn't, it's just a view or an idea. There's no collective cumulative kamma?

## **Leigh Brasington**

No, I'm saying it's only collective.

## **Attendee question**



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It's only collective, but what about accumulative? It's collective in the sense that kamma, as long as we are in that stream, we're all subject to the kamma. The karma that's universal. We're all creating it and we're all experiencing it. I think that's what you're saying. But what about accumulative then?

## Leigh Brasington

Well, it's cumulative in that, you know, they invaded Iraq, and now we're dealing with ISIS. That's cumulative to the world at large that there are all these terrorists who were basically created by the invasion of Iraq. Maybe Putin invaded Ukraine, he thought, well, Americans got away with invading Iraq didn't seem to go too bad for them. And so the cumulative karma of it gave Putin bad ideas and he invaded Ukraine, maybe that's part of it as well. Don't try and figure out all the threads, it'll lead to madness or great vexation.

So yes, it accumulates and where does it accumulate in the universe? There's not some guys upstairs that are writing down, "Oh she did a good thing, we'll give her two points. He did a bad thing, minus seven. That's not happening. What you do changes the universe, and so it's accumulating in the universe with every action that you do. And it's accumulating in your own brain with every thought, speech, and action because you're reprogramming yourself with everything that you do.

For example, someone joins an urban gang, right? What do they make them do, go out and commit a crime, so they'll be useful to the gang, so they'll get used to committing crime, so it won't be a big deal for them. Reprogram their brain so they'll be a criminal. Right? Well, we reprogram our brains with everything that we do. So it's accumulating up here, and it's accumulating in the wider universe as well. Does that help?

## Attendee question

Yes, thank you very much.

## Attendee question

So I haven't read Stephen's book yet. And I think I will, I will definitely do that. All the other times that I've tried to read Nagarjuna, besides getting a little perplexed, I've just really felt like I was trying to get my merit badge in emptiness. So I was so glad when you brought up the fact that the Buddha just teaches suffering and the end of suffering he's not really trying to get us to go through this mental exercise and, as you're saying, who's keeping score. And as you said, emptiness is a concept too. So I was just looking at the PDF and for me the three lines are really helpful. I always think of this as, okay, I've just had this great meditation on emptiness, and I get up and I'm walking and I stub my toe. And suddenly I'm in a rage or something like that, obviously, I'm missing something. So your line here "papañca generates thoughts" and I guess you could put in saññā or sankara. It leads to compulsive acts. "Papañca is stopped by emptiness." And to me, that's the emptiness I want to understand. I don't need to go through all of the manifestations. But if I can get down to that simple level, then I'll be happy.

## Leigh Brasington

Yeah, that's where we want to go. Part of that emptiness that helps stop the papañca is realizing that not only is there nothing worth craving, there's nothing that can be clung to. It's all empty.



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It's all impermanent. It's all changing all the time. And furthermore, there's nobody to actually succeed in clinging to what is craved. And so getting that at, not an intellectual level, but at a felt since level, this is what the Buddha's after. This is the way to freedom. Uproot the craver and there's no more craving, no more dukkha.

## Attendee question

Right, Lynn.

## Leigh Brasington

So I really like what you were saying about the universal nature of kamma and not trying to make it too personal, it's out there somewhere in the world. And yet, I am the owner of my kāma here to my kāma born of my kāma related to my karma abide supported by my kāma Whatever kamma I shall do for good or for ill of that I will be the heir. So how does how do those fit together? Thank you.

Okay, so sometimes the Buddha had taught self and sometimes he taught not-self And sometimes he taught there's neither self nor no self at all. So this is a teaching on self. The five daily reflections from Anguttara 557, I am of the nature to grow old, sick, and die. I'm not exempt from those. All that is mine, dear, and delightful change and vanish. These are very much relative teachings are being taught on a relative level, we can't dismiss the relative level.

So from the relative perspective, yeah, I'm going to grow old, sick, and die. The old part's already happening. I can see every time I look in the mirror, right? I've had things that I found dear and delightful that changed and vanished. So on a personal relative level, all that's going on.

The actions I do, yeah, are going to have consequences. So I live supported by my karma, my previous actions. Well, I worked as a computer programmer earned a bunch of money. You know, now I get Social Security and I got a nest egg. So I live supported by my previous actions, right? I am born of my karma, who I am right now has occurred for actions I've done in the past.

Were they done by some other person in the past that had made me who I am? Well certainly, a lot of people, those English guys that came over and ran off everybody else or suppressed them. Yeah, that's part of who I am now. So it wasn't me. But those actions have had an impact on me. I'm related to my karma. At the time of the Buddha, no social security, you only had your family. Your relations were the most important thing that you had. Your actions and their consequences are as important as your relatives. When you look at that from perspective of India, two and a half thousand years ago.

So yeah, getting a sense of that, this is a teaching from the relative perspective, the conventional perspective. And it's very important to realize that the Buddha wasn't doing consistent metaphysics. It wasn't like he stopped talking about "I" and only talked about something on an ultimate level. He's like, yeah, this is important. Do this practice. It'll be good for you. Until you get fully awakened, you're gonna be assuming you have an "I". So your "I" is gonna get old, sick, and die. Your "I" is gonna be dependent upon the actions that it does. Pay



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particular attention to what you're about to do, it's gonna have consequences. That's what he's trying to teach.

## **Leigh Brasington**

So, yeah. Does that help? All right. Any other questions? John.

## **Attendee question**

Hi, just a simple question. Will there be a way to access these recordings to listen to some of it again?

## **Leigh Brasington**

Yes. It'll be on Audio Dharma. You give it a week for them to edit the cord recordings. That way, it will show up there on audio dharma. And after it shows up and I realized where it is, I will put a link on my webpage under talks that will point to it as well. But probably easiest is to go to Audio dharma and plug in my name search for

## **Attendee question**

thank you so much for this.

## **Attendee question**

Hey Leigh, I guess I may be stating something really obvious. When you said emptiness is also a concept, I assume that you can't just have that at the very getgo. It's like the raft analogy. You have to kind of go through understanding all the SODAPI and everything else. And maybe towards the end of this, you can give up or abandon this idea of emptiness...

## **Leigh Brasington**

Not abandon it. Just know that it's just another concept. A useful one. Because something's empty doesn't mean you abandon it. You just know that it's dependently originated as well.

## **Attendee question**

But I guess maybe my point is, if I think of that as just another concept at the very early part of this whole idea of dependent origination, I seem to think that that may make it harder for me to go through the understanding of this part of the teaching. So I guess maybe I'm clarifying with you if there's a timing part of this to understand this. That's one of my questions.

## **Leigh Brasington**

Yeah. So there very definitely is. So I had read Stephen Batchelor's translation, "Verses From the Center," let's say somewhere between half a dozen a dozen times. Never got a hint of it. His translation doesn't do it justice really. And I read Jay Garfield's translation, which does do it justice. And it still went over my head until I read it the second time. And when I got it, I literally jumped out of the couch that I was sitting on and go, "yes!" That I understood at that point that, yeah, even emptiness is just another concept to try and help us out.

All of this, the Four Noble Truths, they're concepts to try and help us out. Dependent origination is just another concept to try and help us out. But these are all very, very useful concepts. As it turns out, anything that we can talk about, well, we're just talking about concepts. We have to



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conceptualize it to be able to talk about it. But it doesn't mean that, just because it's a concept, it's not useful. Because it's all, I mean...this is a cell phone, right? It has a material existence. But unless I conceptualize it as a cell phone and punch the thing on the back that makes it wake up, and dial the number, whatever. Until I actually start using it, it's just a concept. But even then, the idea of a phone call is just a concept. But it's a very useful concept. They're all concepts, but some of them are quite useful. And emptiness is just another one of these quite useful concepts.

But I would say, don't worry about it. I'd say the most important thing is just realize that whatever you're experiencing is dependently originated. And just keep looking at that. More and more. And then hopefully, at some point, the fact that everything is a concept becomes equivalent to "oh, everything is dependently originated." I'm just stopping these streams at this point and making a concept out of it, because that's useful at point, at the conventional level. Does that help?

## **Attendee question**

Yes, very much so. A second question is, regarding the concentration practice, the jhana practice, is there a certain stage in one's spiritual path where one should engage in that? Or just whenever you feel like you're ready? Or how would you point it out to some of us?

## **Leigh Brasington**

So what I tell people, if you want to come on a retreat with me, you need to have done two one-week or longer residential retreats. By that point, you will have enough meditation experience to where you can start to learn the jhānas. Hopefully. There's no guarantees, but that seems to be the minimum. You really go on your first residential retreat to find out what it's like to be on a retreat. And you go on your second residential retreat to find out it wasn't quite like what you thought it was. So then on your third retreat, you're really ready to get going.

And so two one-week or longer residential retreats is usually enough background so that, at that point, you could make sense of what's being taught. Because to do that, you're going to have to learn to meditate. You're going to be doing stuff before you go on retreat, between the retreats, and so forth. So yeah, get some skill at meditation, be able to follow your breath, at least somewhat, you know, learn how to do some metta practice, those sorts of skills you want to have coming in. Because my retreat, I just assume everybody knows how to meditate. And so I say, all right, here's some ways that you can work with your breathing that will take it to a deeper level. But I don't tell you so much about how to do it.

And someone put in the chat residential retreats are not easily accessible. Well, yeah, these days, they're not easily accessible at all, unfortunately. So I do accept two one-week or longer Zoom retreats. But of course, you will have to be really dedicated on that Zoom retreat. You can't just show up for the dharma talks. I mean, you've got to really actually meditate and keep silence and so forth. To have enough background. But even back before COVID, yeah, you needed to be able to take time off work, and they cost money and so forth. I wish it was more easily available, it would be a better world if everybody had an easily available retreat. Amy?

## **Attendee question**



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Hello. Thank you very much for today, for your book. I want to address, ask you a question about the idea that we conceptualize everything used. The example of the Corvette is very helpful. If you think about its component parts. we conceptualize it as a Corvette. The example of the cell phone, also very easy entryway into those that idea. Even your glass, as my experience of it would have been pixels, actually. And even if that glass was physically in that space with me, I could also break it down to, I think you said if it fell and smashed into a million pieces, it would still be the same thing. I guess it's an entryway into seeing the concept of the glass as false. What I'm a little bit stuck on is for example, the water in the glass. If I may

## **Leigh Brasington**

So, materiality. If I spill the water on the floor, it's still water. But what if it soaks into the floor? I mean, it didn't evaporate, it just soaked into the floor. Now it's part of the floor. So it's changed. It's not...right? Now, the hydrogen and oxygen atoms are still the same. Okay, so at that level, there's not a lot of change going on. Except when we really get down to that level. But that's not where we're doing our craving and clinging, right? We're doing the craving and clinging at a much more macroscopic level. You know, when I'm thirsty I'm not clinging to the oxygen atom at that point in the glass. I'm clinging to the water because it'll sate my thirst. So we're working at the level of practicality for understanding the reality that we're interacting with such that we don't interact with it with the craving and clinging bit.

Yeah, materiality may change form, the water may evaporate, it may freeze, something like that. It's still water. Okay. But when it's ice, it's conceptualized different than when it's steam. Those two are really conceptualized different even though it's the same atoms, perhaps, that are involved. And so we can get down into the quantum level and all this other stuff. But that's not where we're doing our craving and clinging. So when we step back to the world in which we're operating, where's craving and clinging? Yeah, it's a glass. It's a cell phone. It's me. Right? And I'm just, I'm empty as everything else. I'm just the product of a bunch of streams of dependently arising processes interacting. And so it's that level that we're going to find freedom. I don't think we're going to find freedom by not clinging to oxygen atoms or something like that. Does that help?

## **Attendee question**

Yes, it does. Thank you very much.

## **Attendee question**

Hi, thank you. This has been extremely helpful. My question is, you mentioned earlier, Buddhist metaphysics. And having been originally trained in meditation and Buddhist philosophy in the Tibetan system, I definitely got a big dollop of that. Some parts, whereas the explanation of emptiness that I received in the Theravāda system make sense to me, I can understand that, there was something that felt always elusive, highly convoluted, abstract, and not clearly proven by the example that we're given on the way emptiness is explained in the Tibetan systems. Now, some teachers say that the two explanations are compatible. Others like Thanissaro Bhikkhu, say they're not. And I'd like to have your response to that. Because I don't want to give up something just because it's difficult, or maybe the terms have been translated poorly, or it's, whatever. But I don't want to continue to put a lot of effort into something that doesn't go anywhere. And particularly when it comes to emptiness of phenomena, and everything is like a



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dream. Sometimes it seems to be taken a little bit too extreme to me. It becomes almost like what is the term? There is a term that comes from psychol...spiritual bypass. You get what I'm saying, right?

## **Leigh Brasington**

I do. I get what you're saying. So I have studied some Tibetan philosophy and teachings and practices. But I would not say that my understanding of Tibetan philosophy is broad enough to say that, yes, it does come together, exactly at the same place that the emptiness comes together from the Theravadan perspective. But I see a lot of similarities. And I see where it could be possible, but I can't, I just don't have enough background to say for sure. Certainly, there are schools in the Tibetan who are looking to the Mulamadhyamakakarika as a very basic foundational practice for their understanding of emptiness.

But well, the truth be told, I haven't found any system in Buddhism or anything else that I totally agree with. I mean, maybe it's hubris on my part. But they say if you understand quantum mechanics it proves you have no clue about quantum mechanics. Okay, I don't claim to understand quantum mechanics. But I think the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics, the so-called Copenhagen interpretation, I think it's mistaken. But I'm not going to sit here and try and explain to you everything about why I think it's mistaken. And what the right way to look at it is. I just get the sense that no, they've missed the point here. And yes, it does have to do with conceptualization.

So, I mean, I don't agree with orthodox Theravadan Buddhism, I don't agree with Tibetan Buddhism, I don't agree with Zen Buddhism, in any of these in their entirety. But I agree with enough of what they're teaching that I find it useful. And so that's what I'm working on. What can I find in here that's helpful for me? What can I find in these teachings that propels me down the spiritual path? What can I find in here that helps me do less craving and clinging, helps me to be a more compassionate person? And I'm finding that in all of these, well maybe not in quantum mechanics but in all the Buddhist teachings, I do find there's helpful stuff there. So I take what I find helpful. And the rest of it I just put in the "I don't know" bucket. The "I don't know" bucket I've got's really quite big. And I just, you know, pull stuff out and look at it. And a lot of times just throw it back in. Sometimes I get to an understanding and come up with something like SODAPI. Yeah, have a good "I don't know" bucket and throw a lot of stuff in there and pick stuff out of it occasionally, when you get some new information. See if it makes sense.

## **Attendee question**

Thank you. That's helpful. Thank you.

## **Leigh Brasington**

Good. So, got five minutes. I think that's time for metta. So in order to begin, please put your attention on your breath for a few moments.

So do you like to be happy? I mean, if you're happy, is that a good thing? Do you like that? Can you appreciate it when you're happy? Wouldn't it be nice to be happy right now? Can you get in touch with the fact "I like being happy?" May you be happy. Do you like it when your friends are happy? I mean, is that a good thing? I like it when my friends are happy? A lot more fun to hang



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out with them. Wouldn't it be great if all of your friends were happy? May all of our friends be happy.

What if your acquaintances were happy? What if everybody at work, everybody in the grocery store, all your neighbors, what if they were all happy? That'd be nice. You know all the clerks are happy. Your neighbors are all happy. Wouldn't it be great if all of our acquaintances were happy? May everyone we encounter be happy.

What if the difficult people in our lives were happy? I mean genuinely happy, happy because of wholesome activities. Not that evil thing, whatever they were doing. Alright, but wouldn't it be nice if all the difficult people could find a source of wholesome happiness? They'd probably be a lot less difficult. May all of the difficult people be happy, wholesomely happy. What if everybody on the planet was happy? What would that be like, everybody everywhere happy. I'd like that. That's where I want to live. May all beings everywhere be happy.

So, thank you. It is said that a good way to make good karma is to teach the dhamma. So I appreciate this opportunity. So may any merit from today's teachings be for the benefit and liberation of all beings everywhere. And as I mentioned earlier, all the dana that you send to sati center for today will go to Ukrainian relief.

I'll leave you with these words: "All I'm saying is simply this, that all mankind is tied together. All life is interrelated. And we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality." That's from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. May all of you be happy, healthy, and may your practice be fruitful.