



Dhammapada: Gems of Wisdom (2 of 3)

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Kim Allen

So welcome to everyone who's just signing on now it's nice to see you again. We're going to continue to explore Gil Fronsdal's translation of the Dhammapada. And I want to remind you, as we're getting started, that part of reading this text is getting used to its language. Sometimes the language can sound a little bit stark. The terminology for this week particularly includes words like evil, defilement, corruption, etc. And I think as we get familiar with the language, we can look beyond particular terms to ask, you know, what is the spiritual teaching that's being offered here? And how might it apply in my own life, in order to become more peaceful and free? So hopefully, that's doable, but that's often, you know, that's a real issue with reading these early texts. So the topic for today is waking up. And I meant that in the sort of initial sense where we become conscious of the human condition, you know, what it is that we're up against in our life, and how our usual strategies for coping with life can be quite fragile, and sometimes ineffective. That's a lot of what brings people to practice actually is: A. the realization of we're up against in life, or B. the realization that how I'm doing things doesn't seem to be working very well, in some sense. And that helps that initial waking up, being ready to practice, being open to the teachings.

So the chapters that we read for today, have a greater focus on ideas that could arouse in people the inspiration or the urgency to practice. I'll just read something I wrote from the homework assignment, we might think of phrases like "warnings of trouble" or "seeing what we try to avoid", or more positively, "learning to see differently from conventional ideas of happiness", just in case, we find that the conventional ones aren't working for us as well. So these, both of these rouse our energy to wake up and inspire us toward the goal of practice. So we'll see kind of both sides of that. So already, we have another contrast, we have urgency and inspiration, which are similar, but not the same, right? In the case of urgency, the Buddha is kind of lighting a fire under people to wake them (or us) up from the dream of sensual pleasures, and just living for pleasant experiences and trying to avoid unpleasant ones, which we're encouraged in through society. But most people find that it's not quite enough. So we could say that urgency is related to the that first savor that we talked about last time, remember, of energy, of viriya, or heroism. So that's one side of it. And then in the case of inspiration, the Buddha also offers a vision of what it is possible to do when we wake up and begin to practice, there's something much better that we could be aiming for, then just making our life relatively pleasant. And so this relates to that second savor of peace or Santi, that we talked about last time also. So we have the twin movements of moving away from dukkha and moving toward the end of dukkha. They're really the same movement. I've sometimes seen them depicted as the front and back of a hand, but they're going in the same direction. But of course, to do that we would need the wisdom to know, to discern the difference, you know, between what is dukkha and what is the end of dukkha what is going toward dukkha and what is going away from it. Dukkha being



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suffering, unsatisfactoriness, unreliability, the challenges of life. So recall also that I had asked you to come prepared with a verse that you found inspiring and a verse that you found puzzling in some dharmic way, just from the chapters that we read for today. So that's a little reminder. We'll get to those later.

Okay, so let's look a little bit at what we might call, "What is the problem?" And that doesn't mean what's wrong with you, or you know, why are you doing it wrong? Instead, "What is the problem?" refers to the Buddha, giving his diagnosis of the ills of the world or the universe, the deep and very real challenges of the human condition. Many people find the sense of this to be refreshing. I know I did, when I started practice, there's a certain clarity to just saying up front what the problems are. But of course, it's also sometimes challenging for us to hear that because it turns out that many of the problems are in our own heart. And we have to do the work of working with that and changing it. We like to think that the problems are out there. It's that person, it's that group, it's this system, it's this institution, it's this, all those other people that are not thinking correctly. The Buddha is a little clearer about that. We might go back, this was from last week's reading, of course, but the very first lines of the Dhammapada, you know: "Mind is the forerunner of all things, speak or act with a corrupt mind and suffering follows, speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness follows."

So the Dhammapada only briefly mentions the list of the Four Noble Truths. And we'll see that today. But the chapters that we read for today have quite a bit to do with the truth of dukkha, and the truth that clinging or craving is the cause of dukkha. So those are the first and second of the noble truths. I think the chapter titles alone would give you have some idea of that. And once again, we'll see that the chapters, I'll just mention that the chapters don't really divide up neatly into beginner teachings and advanced teachings or teachings on each of the four noble truths. That's not how the Dhammapada is organized. And so everything that we're talking about today, you could find examples of in other chapters, of course, but nonetheless, we can find themes that are emphasized in certain chapters. And that's what we've done for today. So I think we're highlighting these particular issues today about waking up and seeing what the problem is, and then getting inspired to practice. So we started out with a broad overview in chapter three, the mind. And that word for mind is citta, C-I-T-T-A, which could also be translated as heart. We don't have such a sharp division in this understanding, the Buddhist understanding between mind and heart as we sort of evolved in Western thinking. So we have the heart-mind, we could maybe say, the citta, and this is where the Buddha locates the seat of the problem. And we get some powerful images that I think many people can relate to. So as I did last week, I'm going to read verses as we go along and talk about the main ideas. And so you don't need to flip through the book and find them because I'll read them.

So we have verses 33 through 36- the Mind: "The Restless, agitated mind, hard to protect, hard to control. The sage makes straight as a Fletcher the shaft of an arrow. Like a fish out of water thrown on dry ground, this mind thrashes about trying to escape Mara's command, the mind-hard to control, flighty, alighting where it wishes, one does well to tame. The disciplined mind brings happiness. The mind, hard to see- subtle- alighting where it wishes, the sage protects. The watched mind brings happiness." So I think many people can relate to this. There's a reference there to Māra, which means the forces of distraction in the mind. Sometimes the forces of temptation for us to get lost in sense pleasure. Sometimes it's personified into a being



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who shows up and torments people who are trying to meditate. And this word Māra actually comes from the Pali word for death. Do you remember last time in verse 21, where it said negligence is the path to death, and the negligent are as if already dead? So this image is in line with that. Yeah, so if you've done mindfulness meditation, you may have noticed that your mind is flighty and not so easy to control. And when it is somewhat calm, or we're at least able to be mindful of the agitation, then there's a kind of happiness to that. So that's what's talked about in these first verses of the chapter on the mind. So the Buddha, once again, just like verses one and two, from last week, he's locating the problem in a sense in our own mind and heart. And then what is the solution? So we find later on in chapter three verses 42, and 43: "Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, or haters, one to another, far worse is the harm from one's own wrongly directed mind. Neither mother nor father, nor any relative can do one as much good as one's own well directed mind. So we have the wrongly directed mind and the well directed mind. So it seems that the solution is training, to train the mind to be well directed." So some of the problems that we have, as humans are genuinely fundamental. So we see that in chapter 11, old age, everybody's body is going to get old, if you live that long. And the Buddha is pointing out that it's often our relationship to experience that makes the difference in whether we suffer or not. But it's not just a simple, it's not just an easy switch, you know, just oh, well, let's just reframe, you know, flip how I see old age, I'll just see it differently. We can try that. But it will only really work at a surface level, we are going to have to actually practice now in order to be prepared for the difficulties of aging. And we often choose to ignore the reality of impending age. And the Buddha encourages us not to do that. So we have, for example, verse 146, from Chapter 11: "Why the laughter Why the joy when flames are ever burning, surrounded by darkness, shouldn't use search for light." So you know, taking just out of context, we might see that as somewhat depressing. I put a damper on the celebration that we have, you know, in our youth, but it's essentially just kind of a, you know, a wake up call to maturity. Shouldn't you search for light? Shouldn't you search for something that is good and bright and alive. Even while you're alive, we can find deeper aliveness in order to prepare for old age. And then it continues somewhat starkly in verse 152: "The person of little learning grows old like an ox, the flesh increases, but the Insight does not." So it's kind of a tough image. But, you know, we're going to have to do some work. He's saying, you know, just getting old doesn't necessarily bring wisdom.

And, of course, that same chapter, it's not all depressing. That same chapter includes two verses that contrast with this general tone of alarm and warning. Verses 153 and 154 describe the Buddha's triumph over aging and death. And you may have heard this, it's this powerful image of the house builder: "Through many births, I have wandered on and on, searching for but never finding the builder of this house. To be born again and again is suffering. house builder- you are seen, you will not build a house again. All the rafters are broken, the ridge pole destroyed. The mind gone to the unconstructed has reached the end of craving." So we're on 153, 154 in chapter 11. It's like a little burst of inspiration amid the description of the problem. So there's some references in these verses. The unconstructed is nibbāna. And of course, the term contrasts with the construction of a house right? The house refers to individuality to selfhood or the body. (I'm taking this from the commentary. There's an end note about this Gil's book.) It says the builder is craving or wanting, and there are other parallels listed also. So this is an extended metaphor. Through these verses, about what we construct, we construct ourselves, our identity, our place in the world. That's what we're taught to do. We're taught how to be a self



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in the world as we grow up. And the Buddha says that's actually the problem. And there's another way of being that is not about doing that. And that's what we can discover through spiritual practice. As a side note, I mentioned that there's an idea that these words are the Buddha's own shout of triumph upon full awakening. That's something that you'll kind of hear casually said, but the early teachings in the Pali canon, don't attribute these words to the Buddha. The other place that they appear is in the Therīgāthā, which are the awakening poems of the early monks and they're attributed to the monk Sivaka. So this is not technically the Buddha's awakening poem. Okay, so then back to the Dhammapada text, we then come to a handful of chapters that straightforwardly treat some of the major forms of unskillful conduct and thought. So remember, back in chapter three, the problem was said to be the wrongly directed mind. All of the other chapters that we read for today, or at least almost all of them, are essentially an elaboration on what is the wrongly directed mind what does that mean? So there are different emphases in different chapters.

So for example: chapters 18, Corruption and 22, Hell (sorry for the terminology) I read those as mainly treating the precepts, mainly being about a wrongly directed mind does unethical things. So for example, verses 246 to 247 in chapter 18: "One digs up one's own root here in this very world, if one kills, lies, steals, goes to another spouse, or gives oneself up to drink, and intoxicants. So some of you may recognize those quite straightforwardly as the list of the five lay precepts, not killing, not lying, not stealing, no sexual misconduct and not intoxicating the mind. So that's one of the ways we wrongly direct the mind. And then moving on to Chapter 22. Let me note that the word "Hell"- the title, that's how the title is translated, but the Buddhist understanding is not like the Christian understanding. So hell is not a permanent destiny that you get sent to, it's just one possibility for rebirth that is, like any other birth, temporary. So if you do, if you have very bad karma ripening at the time of death, you can end up in hell, you'll go to hell for a while, but then that karma will run out, and you'll be reborn somewhere else. So it's a whole different concept, just in case you were carrying the Christian understanding. So in this chapter, also, broadly about precepts, a fair amount of the criticism actually falls on renunciates, who are not actually living an ethical life. So remember, I said last time that there was this group of people who had kind of opted out of society, and were living with their alms bowls out in the forest, practicing meditation, or various austerities. And the idea was that you were supposed to be, you know, living ethically- you had opted out of society, because you wanted to live in a better way. And the Buddha criticizes that not all the renunciates were doing that. But he also criticizes lay people in this chapter too. So, for example, we have verse 317. Seeing danger in what's not dangerous, and not seeing danger in what is, those who take up wrong views go to a bad rebirth. So I actually chose to quote this verse because it locates the difficulty in one's mind in one's views. So maybe one doesn't correctly see what is actually dangerous, for instance, poor behavior, poor speech, not living well. And then, you know, if we don't understand that those things are dangerous in terms of our life unfolds, then we would make consequential mistakes in our conduct.

So I would say that chapters 18 and 22, focus more on ethics. And then we have some chapters that focus more on the side of aversion. So that's another wrong way to wrongly direct the mind is toward aversion, anger, Ill Will, cruelty, that spectrum of mind states. We can locate chapter 10: violence, and chapter 17: anger, in that direction. So for example, verse 130, in chapter 10, "All tremble at violence, life is dear for all. Seeing others as being like yourself, do not kill or



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cause others to kill." So this is a version of the golden rule, isn't it? So if we saw that other people are like us, other people want to be happy, other people are afraid of violence, other people don't want to be harmed or killed, then we would behave in such a way that, you know, we didn't do that. They don't want that, I don't want that, they don't want that either. Do not kill or cause others to kill. Verse 133, also from chapter 10: "Don't speak harshly to anyone, what you say will be said back to you. Hostile speech is painful, and you will meet with retaliation." So the same concept clear enough. But chapter 10 also contains several interesting verses that offer guidance for how to live well, as well as some hope that we can really do it. So this isn't a chapter that's not just focused on the title, on violence. So for example, verse 144, "Like a good horse alert to the whip, be ardent and alarmed, with faith, virtue, effort, concentration, and discernment, accomplished in knowledge and good conduct, mindful, you will leave this great suffering behind." So it tells you the problem, but also says that we could, we can do it, you know, we can do it. And here are some of the ways to do it. Here's some of the qualities to cultivate. If you want not to be part of this violence issue. I want to comment on one word, the word alarmed. The word in Pāli there is Samvega, which really means kind of spiritual urgency. It's like that viriya energy that we savor that we talked about earlier. So I thought about what would be- I don't think alarm, is the best translation for that, because it's not meant to be an agitated, you know, terror or fearful state in a sense. So I think we could try "galvanized" there instead of alarmed, to be ardent and galvanized, ready to act on the path essentially. And then it has this list, faith, virtue, effort, concentration, and then discernment. That is actually list a dharmic list. So we saw the five precepts referenced earlier without the list without saying these are the five precepts. Here we have the five faculties, the five spiritual faculties referenced, again, without saying that that's an official list. I don't know if any of you recognized it, perhaps some of you did. There are other discourses that say that is it is the maturity of the five spiritual faculties that determines how far a being can go on the path. So the Buddha would give more advanced teachings to people who he saw had mature faculties or ripe faculties. So these are worth developing these five, you're not stuck with the level you were born with. They're totally cultivatable. So there you go, faith, virtue, effort, concentration, and discernment.

And then in chapter 17, I won't quote too much from here, I just want to point out that we have in verse 222, the image of anger as a careening chariot, I really liked that- it can feel like that, can't it? And many of the verses refer to restraint, such as 231, 2,3 and 4. So the Buddha is pretty clear about his view of anger is that it's always unskillful and needs to be restrained, or at least seen mindfully in various ways. This is something that's very clear in the early teachings and got shifted a bit in the later teachings. Okay, so we've seen that some part of the wrongly directed mind is misunderstanding ethics. Part of the wrongly directed mind is about aversion, anger, violence, cruelty, those kinds of mind states. And then we have also two chapters that are more on the side of desire: grasping, wanting craving- those are chapter 16: The Deer and chapter 24: Craving. So these are focused on problems that are based in desire and grasping We see in particular that they are linked. There's a link to fear and grief from these states of wanting essentially. And I find it interesting that in modern neurological research, the center of the brain that's focused on desire and wanting is just next to, or maybe even co-located with the place that the mind expresses fear, the brain expresses fear. So Fear and Desire are intimately linked. And this is obvious when we see it, you know, when you want something, or when you have something, suddenly you're afraid that people are going to take it away; or that you're not going to get it if you don't have it yet, "Oh, what if I don't get it!" So these are very related.



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And then there's also grief, you know, if you really were holding on to something and liked it, there will be grief when it's gone. So this is an important area of practice, because there are things- perfectly good things to want in the world. I don't think we could do our life if we didn't want anything at all. Well, eventually, if we get fully awakened, that will be the case, but for most of us.... So there's a way we have to skillfully relate to things that we want things that we like things that we care about, such that they don't lead to suffering. There's also a sense of, I detected a sense of laziness in those who just settle for what is dear just comes across in that chapter. So not having done the work of releasing the bondage that we have to things that we are attached to. And then the merit that comes from this benefits a person in the next life. So we might think of that as a sweetener to give up something nice from this life. You know, if you release your attachments in this life, you have the promise of a better rebirth. Remember, that's one of the aims that's extolled in the Dhammapada. So I'm reminded, these chapters reminded me of a teaching that's given in the commentaries, that kind of nicely sums up the problems of the mind, and how it is to work with them. It says, desire is less blameable, but harder to remove. Hatred is more blameable, but easier to remove. Delusion is very blameable, and very difficult to remove. So I think we can see this in our own practice, you know, often people work on aversion first. Why? Because it's simultaneously more blameable, more painful, more obvious that it causes problems. And it's easier to remove, because it hurts us just as much, you know, it's so obviously painful. So people come in working with anger, with fear with those kinds of things. And then later, we get to greed, craving, holding on too much to things that we care about. Because it's more subtle, and it's also harder to remove. I know it's more subtle, but it causes slightly less harm in the world, but harder to remove. And then there's the delusion that underlies all of them, that we eventually have to get to. Okay, so this is kind of my initial summary of what's going on in these chapters. There'll be a little bit more later. But let's pause here and see if there are any questions or comments on these readings. And as usual, if you would, please put up your zoom, electronic zoom hand because it's easier for me to see you. And if you could leave it up while you're talking with me, then I don't lose you. Okay, great, Paul. And feel free to unmute.

Questioner:

Yeah, sure. I think I am unmuted. If we go to verse 153-ish, it's actually 156, which you reference today. Those who have neither live the chaste life nor gained wealth and their youth lie around like arrows misfired from a bow lamenting the past. So that's an implication that seems to be sort of encouraging wealth in some ways, which seems to be inconsistent with, for example, attachments and so forth. So would you or anybody like to comment on that?

Kim Allen

So what do you think is meant by wealth in this case?

Questioner:

Well, that's a good question. I do take it in the traditional sense of material wealth.

Kim Allen

We could, the Buddha was not opposed to people, lay people, gaining material wealth; he called it righteous wealth righteously earned, if you earn it through ethical means. But my guess is that



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in this case, he's also including some kind of a metaphorical spiritual sense to the word. So there are various kinds of spiritual wealth, also ethics, the five faculties that I just referenced, etc, there is in fact, an entire sutta that names various kinds of spiritual wealth, the Brahma Viharas, so knowing that the four heart qualities, so my guess is that there's kind of an implication of that. Does that make sense? I've lost you, Paul...

Questioner:

...no, I'm here. It does make sense. Not to parse, it's helpful. But I actually did some research on this- very quickly, and the research seems to be saying no, he kind of did mean wealth, and if you look at the way it's written, it's in contrast to chaste which is sort of I think. So it does, my guess is he means material wealth, but I don't know, of course.

Kim Allen

Yeah. As I said, there's nothing wrong with taking care of oneself in one's life, if one is a lay person. So yeah, I think he's kind of implying that we need to do something in our early life, whether it's earning a good livelihood, but he probably as the Buddha, he would be more interested in us taking care of our ethical, relational, communal, and spiritual lives. In order that when we get to old age, we don't realize, oh, my gosh, I haven't developed my mind at all, I don't have any way of dealing with the pain that comes with the body falling apart, with it getting old, with the approach of death. If we just ignore all those things, it will be hard to deal with them as they're happening.

Questioner:

Hi. Um, I had a question, as I was reading through chapter three "The Mind"? Um, Verse 39, it says, in part, for one who is awake, whose mind isn't overflowing, fear does not exist. I was kind of thrown by that word. Overflowing. Does that mean just the sense doors? Or is there more to it than that?

Kim Allen

It's a good question. I would guess that this is... well, let me ask you, do you have, Do you ever feel like your mind is overflowing?

Questioner:

Oh, sure. Sometimes I sit down to sit and there's just no chance- is the mind is this. The mind is just whirling.

Kim Allen

Yeah. So I think you have a visceral understanding of what's being referred to there. So a mind that's overflowing is one that's really caught up in its stories, or its restlessness, or its- whatever's going on. And so he's saying that awakeness is different from an overflowing mind. And it's usually what we get scared of, is we get scared of our own mental constructions. Isn't that the case? There's a famous story of a monk who was a painter, and he lived in a cave, and he painted a tiger on the cave wall. And he focused so much on making it completely accurate and really perfect. And as he put the finishing touches on it, he got terrified of the of the tiger and ran out of the cave as it was so real, he scared himself. And this is what we do. When the



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mind is overflowing with "what about this? Oh, no that, how can I arrange for this?" Oh, it's all happening. You know, inside. And we scare ourselves.

Yeah, for imagining this might happen. And that might happen. That's always pretty upsetting. Well, not always. It could be good things. But, but...

...then we worry we won't actually get them. So, it makes sense to me. Do you have a further question?

Questioner:

Um, no, that that's very clear. Thank you.

Kim Allen

I think a lot of people can relate to the overflowing mind. Thanks for bringing it up.

Questioner:

I was a little bit challenged with chapter 10 violence, starting on page 35, and I think, I think especially verse 141. Where is said, you know, "No nakedness or matted hair, no filth, dust or dirt. No fasting or sleeping purify a mortal who has not overcome doubt. And it was especially the doubt, that I said, "What? What is that? That's puzzling me. What is that doing in there?" The discussion about doubt in this chapter about violence.

Kim Allen

Okay. Yeah, so he's, I don't know how if this directly relates to violence, as we've said, not every verse seems to unfold naturally from the title of the chapter. But here, he's what he's doing, a lot of what he's doing in this chapter on violence, is criticizing the people who are living as renunciates, but who aren't really doing it as well, maybe that's not the focus of this chapter. But there are cases where he's doing that, like the next verse also. So he says, "No nakedness or matted hair, no filth, dust or dirt." There were people who lived this way- who lived deep austerity practices, and they believed at that time that that would purify them, you know, if I just deny the body enough, if I just torture it, if I, you know, prevent any kind of desire from ever taking root in the mind, and I don't have anything nice or pleasurable, that's gonna really purify my karma. And I will have a great spiritual awakening, there were people who believed that we don't tend to have, you know, that kind of physical austerity in our society. But maybe what the doubt is pointing to, that's a lead up- to the doubt is pointing to, in the Buddhist teachings, doubt is overcome at this stage, the first stage of awakening. So that's when the mind becomes pure enough to perceive nibbana. That cuts a few of the not all of them, but a few of the fetters in the mind that bind it to the round of rebirth. And so not overcoming doubt, is kind of a code for not awakened yet. And so he's saying there's no way that these austerity practices will lead to the first stage of awakening. That's, that's a one line summary of what that verse says.

Questioner:

So many of these chapters this reference to birth and rebirth and many lives, could you sort of explain that? What that is in the 21st century? Because sometimes you think, Oh, well, I can't-if



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I had many lives in the past, I can't really redo them. Right. So when they make these references again and again, over my past lives, I'm not really sure how to take that.

Kim Allen:

Yeah, that's a question that a lot of people have. It was clearly the worldview that the Buddha was kind of syncing up with in his teachings. And some people can kind of roll with that. And some people find it very challenging. Some people find it so challenging, they can't deal with Buddhism, but one way that people- so we all have to find our own relationship to that. But one suggestion is that some some people in this century decide that it refers to psychological states. And, you know, how many births have you had since this morning? A lot, you know, how many worlds have we lived in? You know, for example, if we are cruising along just fine. And then we get angry about something we take birth as the as the person who's angry, who's outraged about something and then, you know, that passes over and we see our friend for tea and we take birth as my friend, the friend of this friend, and then life goes along and we get home and we take birth as a partner to our partner. And so we have many births each day in the different mind stage the different roles were playing, and wandering on and on through rebirth is to be unmindful, and just let karma take charge of that. But if we're aware, we have some choice about not falling into unfortunate births. We don't have to be born as the angry person if we're mindful, and don't let that come up. So that's one way that people relate to the idea of rebirth. Does that help you?

Questioner:

Yeah, that is helpful because they also, I was thinking that as you were talking, that this other idea of karma, right, so the positive karma that you do in this lifetime, is part of that rebirth, as well as the negative karma too

Kim Allen

Oh, absolutely. Karma is meritorious or de-meritorious, and you can't avoid the consequences of either. So if you've been doing ethical things, you can't avoid the happiness that will come from that. Sorry.

Questioner:

Yeah, sorry, you were on the topic, we were talking about 141, which was the one that puzzled me too, "purify mortal who has not overcome doubt." And the reason I find it puzzling is because it implies that the austerities- the way it's worded, it implies that if you overcome doubt, then these austerities are useful. Whereas the Buddha is usually pretty consistent that the austerities aren't really useful. It says no austerities in the squatting posture purify a mortal who has not overcome doubt; it makes you think, once you overcome doubt, then it's useful to fast asleep on the bare ground, etc.

Kim Allen

I can see where the where that idea would come from. If you just sort of turn this around. But in terms of logic, you're you're replacing, you're taking one step too far, right? So if we have not A not B, you're then saying that implies that if A then B, and that complicates...

Questioner:



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it's just the way it's worded. But it's okay. We don't need to belabor it. I think it's clear in context, but thanks. Yep. Okay, thank you. Okay.

Kim Allen

So, now is your chance to speak with each other about this a little bit. And so we'll have some breakout groups. Let's see, we'll go into the breakout group, we'll have groups of three or four of you, like we did last time, and you'll be in the groups for 10 minutes. However, it's not just purely a discussion. So one of the things that's really valuable, the reason that I read these verses, while I'm talking about them is that this was an oral tradition, and the verses are meant to be actually heard. And so it's also useful to hear them from a variety of voices. So this is I hope, going to be a fun exercise, the primary task of your breakout groups is to read to each other. And what you're going to read is the verses that you prepared for today, the one that you find inspirational, and the one that you find puzzling, and you'll do it in two rounds. So I have a little set of instructions that I'll paste into the chat. And those will still be there when you go into your groups. You paste them in now. So you go by the order of your cell phone number, each person, share the verse that you picked out as inspiring. So, and it will just be simple. You've all heard me reading these verses, as we go through, read it like that, just read it straightforwardly. And then the next person and the next person around your group, sit quietly after the first round of the inspiring verses for 20 to 30 seconds. So that you can try to let those words settle. You hear what other people found inspiring. And then you'll do the same thing with a verse that you found puzzling. Go at a slow pace, you have enough time. And then after that you could maybe offer some brief impressions. But really take seriously this idea of reading to each other. It's so valuable. And so in line with how these teachings were, I think, meant to be shared. Seems to be everyone, so we would have time for maybe just one or two comments if anyone wants to share anything from how that was. Was it interesting to read and hear other people read?

Questioner:

Okay, thanks, everyone, in our group really, really liked this idea of reading a couple of verses that they like, are, you know, found puzzling, but we were found, we're kind of all, you know, naturally left with a sense, like, we could spend another 20 minutes like discussing each one. So

Kim Allen

yeah, I realized it was a short time. I considered not allowing any discussion and giving you like five minutes, so that you would just read. But then that seemed a little cruel. So I thought there was a lot of material to cover, so I couldn't make it much longer. But we'll, I'll take that into consideration. I'm glad to know the reading went well. Thank you. Okay, and let's, oh, Carlotta, you have a comment?

Questioner:

Yeah, the reading went really well, in our group as well, I think it's very helpful to hear someone reading and what other people have picked as a verse really brought another light. I personally chose the second one, verse 152, which you read, regarding the person of little learning grows old, like, like an ox. And why that was puzzling to me. It was because in my personal experience, I feel that I most likely have been a person of little learning. However, as I grow older, I, I see that there is a vacuum in myself and so it has bringing me to the practice and to these teachings. So not so sure that as my flesh has increased, Insight has not.



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Kim Allen

you may be a person of more learning than you give yourself credit for

Questioner:

Well, I don't know, but I got the this idea. You know, I mean, as the saying goes that, as you grow older you grow wise, I understand that it's not 100% All the time. But I think that some truth is there.

Kim Allen

You're right in a sense, actually, you're right. The Buddha says in another teaching, that it's possible for people to even give up completely give up attachment to the body without doing any meditation, simply by observing carefully at how it's obviously not permanent, obviously not ourself. It doesn't lead to complete freedom, because we have to free the mind also. So he does acknowledge that there's wisdom that comes independent of practice as one ages. But in this particular verse, He doesn't highlight the way you said it. He highlights instead the the part about he wants to light a fire, we should do some work. But I think what you said is true. Yeah. Thank you. Okay, so we'll go on now with a short guided meditation once again, to experience the verses in a more meditative way as we did last time.

So settling in and I'll offer some brief guidance and add during it, there will be the dropping in of a few verses. So finding a posture where you can sit comfortably in meditation, and just drawing your attention inward, closing your eyes if that's okay for you. Maybe taking a deep breath, and on the out breath, softening the body letting the shoulders drop, letting the belly soften perhaps leaning back slightly if we have a habitual tendency to lean toward the screen softening the eyes and the eye sockets. And bringing the quality of mindfulness to the fore. So becoming attentive to experience in this moment. Just as it is knowing that you know, knowing that you're aware

Irrigators guide water. Fletchers shape arrows, carpenters fashion wood, the well practiced tame themselves. allowing the mindfulness to connect to the body. Sensing the body and sitting posture, or lying down, if that's what you're doing whatever posture you're in finding some balance, and you can shift back and forth a little in the seat, just finding that middle place where it takes the least amount of effort to be upright. Or if you're lying down, just making sure your spine is relatively straight and as you rest with the body, feeling the breath not just at the nostrils or some smaller location, but if you can, feeling the breath as a whole body experience as we breathe in and out, we can feel the clothing shifting against the skin, you can feel it in the nasal area all the way down into the chest, the belly, it really involves a lot of the body. We don't have to do anything different with the breath, just sensing its full range.

Now I invite you to sense into one or more places in the body that currently feel energized or alive and don't have pain. So finding some spot like that, maybe the hands or really anywhere that feels like that, attending to that part of the body with mindfulness.

Knowing how it is without grasping at it or trying to make it feel even better, to some part of the body that's currently comfortable and alive.



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Now I invite you to shift the attention and sense into one or more places in the body that feels tired, or achy or stiff or even painful in a gentle way. But attending with mindfulness and also with wisdom. Maybe some compassion. This is how it is for these parts of the body or this part.

If it's ever too much, you can of course redirect the attention but the idea is just to be with the part that's not so comfortable right now.

And again opening up the attention to the whole body in sitting posture or whatever posture widening the attention out to encompass the whole of the body. We might say the world of the body has many different parts, many different feelings and sensations this body as it is right now

come work on this world as a beautiful royal chariot, fools flounder in it, but the discerning do not cling. even the splendid Chariots of the royalty wear out. So too does the body decay. But the dharma of the virtuous doesn't decay for it is upheld when the virtuous teach it to good people. Just resting mindfulness.

Okay

So the readings for today that we had are not only about difficulties and unwholesome mind states and the problems of human existence, they also point toward ideas that might inspire our practice. And if we start to, say we start to agree with the Buddha, that there is a problem and that it lies in poor habits and distractiveness of mind, we can ask, is there any hope? And the answer is yes, yes, the Buddha and many of his early disciples managed to disentangle their minds and he offers also some verses that guide us toward that ourselves. So in particular, we'll focus now on chapter 13: The World and chapter 14: The Buddha, as well as, Yeah, in fact, some of the verses in the other chapters that we already discussed, include some verses of hope, like I read the ones about the house builder, that were in a different chapter. So there's some hope, there's one kind of hope in doing skillful actions and living a life of ethics and a life of faith. That's one direction. And then another kind of hope is in actually ending the defilements completely through awakening. So once again, we see the two different goals. One is the goal is a better life now and the possibility of heavenly rebirth. And then the second goal is the goal of awakening, finding complete freedom that can't go back. So verse 168, from Chapter 13: "Rouse yourself, don't be negligent, live the dharma, a life of good conduct. One who lives the dharma is happy in this world. And the next." That's a fairly straightforward exposition of the first goal. And then verse 172, whoever recovers from doing evil by doing something wholesome, illuminates the world like the moon set free from a cloud. So there is hope. If we read all those verses of about corruption, anger, violence and craving, it's nice to know that we can also recover from these unfortunate mind states, right? Whoever recovers from doing evil by doing something wholesome, illuminates the world, like the moon set free from a cloud. Nothing is permanent. Everything is impermanent. This is a major teaching of the Buddha. And so one of the advantages of the teaching of impermanence, it's not all about just, you know, you're gonna lose things that you care about. One of the advantages is that we're never completely trapped by past bad karma. Its effect is always finite.



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So we see that directly here. Some verses are very directly inspirational, like verse 179 of chapter 14: "The Buddha's victory cannot be undone. No one in the world can approach it. By what path would you guide him who has no path whose field is endless. So you might remember we had a previous verse about giving up both victory and defeat. So we see here that victory is being used in a different sense in this verse. So someone else is naming the Buddha as victorious. And then we also have verse 181: "Even the gods envy the awakened ones, the mindful ones, the wise ones, who are intent on meditation and delight in the peace of renunciation. So there's, you know, one goal of being reborn as a god. And then there's the direct statement that even the gods envy those who are practicing for awakening, or who are awakened. It's quite powerful language. And then I just love verse 194: "Happy is the arising of Buddha's Happy is the teaching of the true dharma. Happy is the harmony of the sangha. Happy is the art and practice of those in harmony. So Buddha, Dharma Sangha, in the practice and the path, the inspirations that we have on there for our practice. So I started out, mentioning the First and Second Noble Truths and these verses that we're on now or shading into the third and fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the end of suffering, there is a possibility of ending not just complete, not just suffering, but dukkha. So all unsatisfactoriness unreliability, overcoming the possibility of being reborn again and again, overcoming all of those difficulties. And the fourth truth, the truth of the path that there is a way to get from here to there, typically exemplified as the Noble Eightfold Path. So these ideas are sprinkled all throughout the chapters that we read for today. On the realm of the path, there are a few verses in chapter 14, that give a compact exposition of the key articles of faith for many Buddhists worldwide. So verse 183, is very classic: "Doing no evil, engaging in what skillful and purifying one's mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha's. So that kind of sums it up, you know, don't do the harmful things, do things that are skillful. So it's not only about avoidance, and while you're at it develop the mind. They're similar. They're all related. But there's these kinds of three components this, this verse is quoted very often, it kind of sums up the teachings. And then there's also verses 190- 192: "When someone going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha sees with right insight, the Four Noble Truths, suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering, and the eightfold path leading to the end of suffering, then this is a secure refuge. This is the supreme refuge. By going to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering. And each word there for suffering is dukkha, of course. So notice in these verses that there are two different levels of refuge, there's- both of which are superior to the usual refuges from fear that are stated in the verse prior to that- going to the mountains, going to the forest, etc. So at one level, there's going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. And then it says, "For one who has done that, then they see the Four Noble Truths." It's interesting that nibbāna has many different epithets. You know, there's many different ways synonyms that are offered for it. And they include safety and supreme security. So this is pointing toward the goal of the path. This is the supreme, a secure refuge, the supreme refuge, etc. This is I think the only point in the Dhammapada that the Four Noble Truths are explicitly named like that, you may have noticed now that we've read a good chunk of it, that it's not big on naming lists as teachings. Because it's verse, it's verse, it's not the point of it. It's not an exposition, or an analysis of something. But in this case, the Four Noble Truths are named. And we also found places where the precepts were named, and were the five faculties. But it's not such a focus of this kind of Buddhist text.

So maybe at this point of reading the text, we're getting a clearer sense of the directness of the Buddha's message. It doesn't work to chase pleasures and avoid pain, he's pretty clear on that.



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There are clear, skillful and unskillful actions. And we need the wisdom to know the difference. When you act on that knowledge, you have a life that's good, here and now. And you can even become liberated, if that's your interest. So let's get started. You know, that's, that kind of sums up the directness of the message, that you may have gotten at this point. But next time, we're going to look at some chapters that are broadly aimed at people who are already walking the path. And so people who have started to engage with these teachings, and so once a person has been roused, let's say and set on the path, then there needs to be some nuance about what is actually meant, you know, can get unbalanced, even in wholesome directions. And so we'll look next time at some chapters that have some teachings about, you know, that have a little bit more subtlety to them. And again, there was already subtlety in some of what we've read, but they're more highlighted in the next set that we're reading for next week. So we will have time for a few more questions if you have any at this point. Charles in Bucharest

I just wanted to... it would take about three hours to explain the threads that wove together to bring me here today. But I brought myself inside of a little retreat today and listening to some of Gil's tapes, listening to your talk from last week. And being here tonight, well, for me, it's tonight was really like energizing and affirming because I have been inside of the face of evil, like probably few of us even understand or could experience in the last nine months. And my practice has allowed me to be amidst evil and suffering and be there fully available and not have attachment. And, you know, I think, you know, I'm grateful that I've had fantastic teachers. You know, the service that I've done, all of it has woven this like, refuge. So when I hear about this perfect refuge, it has nothing to do with a cozy room and might be in the front line in Ukraine bring in medicine to children who are in bombed out homes, that might be the refuge. And for me, that has been the refuge. So I'm just grateful that I've had this practice and Wow, it really works. Like, like frontline works. Like like Teflon, like John Gotti and queens, Stefan's job, whatever his name was, you know, it's the humor, you know, I think about Patanjali sutras when he talks about one eyed concentration will have mastery of the senses and what happens, cheerfulness will arise not not not jumping up and down. So I really want to thank you for the symphony of focus and openness that I was able to, you know, I'm heading back to Ukraine on Monday morning, and I just wanted to this this was a real gift to be here. This was an amazing gift to be here. Thank you very much.

Well, I think we can say in return that your presence and your what you've just shared with us is just as much that gift. Thank you so much, Charles and may these teachings carry you and carry also to benefit the people that you're going to be interacting with. Thank you for your work. Huge.

Questioner:

I too want to thank Charles and all those on the front lines and you for holding this class. My question actually goes back to understanding a line of the text verses remembered only as part of our group exercise. It's line or verse 352. "Knowing the order of the teachings, what precedes and what follows one is said to be a person of much wisdom." I must confess my ignorance.

Kim Allen

So 352, That wasn't for today was it?



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Questioner:

It is in my study notes chapter 24: Craving- you're right you're right, I was looking at the wrong chapter. So yes, free of craving and craving knowing the order of the teachings one is said to be a person of great and much wisdom in one's final body.

Kim Allen

So that's a reference to the arahant. When a person reaches the final stage of awakening, that the fruit of that is not to be reborn. So one is in one's final body.

Questioner:

So that is not something to be worried about too soon?

Kim Allen

I don't know it can happen at any time, you never know. Okay, that's what it's referring to. So someone who has stages of awakening and practiced very well. Alright.

Questioner:

That does help.

Questioner:

It's kind of like Wendy's. The thing I was curious, mentioned in the small group in 220. Someplace this idea, the merit we have made receives us. And I mentioned in the small group, I always think of myself moving towards a field of good or bad consequences rather than the field opening to receive me. And I, that's a way of expressing that I have I haven't seen. Would you have any comment on that?

Kim Allen

Yeah, it says in passing from this world to the next, the merit we have made receives us. So that's a reference to what happens when we're going through the rebirth process. And it said that, you know, the amount of merit that we bring to that moment and what is ripening in that moment, has an effect on where we're going to be reborn. So, if you know if the moment is not so favorable for us and the mind is in a poor state, then it will find a rebirth in one of the lower realms, whereas if it's in meritorious state, various wholesome states are present, then you can find a rebirth in the human or heavenly realms.

Questioner:

I notice the sense of being swallowed by something.

Kim Allen

Yeah,

Questioner:

that kind of got me in a good way. I mean, I like it



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Kim Allen

yeah, it is a little bit unusual phrasing. I also there. Haven't heard a lot about the merit receiving us but I can see it you know, you can see it in the poetry of it. Does the the moment of rebirth makes sense there to you? That that's what it's referring to.

Questioner:

yeah it does and I mean, I take that as a given for personally. Rebirth.

Kim Allen

Yeah, we all find our relationship. Yeah.

Okay. Well, if there aren't further questions, then we'll just wrap up for a moment. We have our third class next week for those who can be there. And the instruction is to read the next set of assigned chapters which will finish off everything that we haven't read. And we're also repeating the last two chapters. And I think you will find that the repeat of those chapters, they look different than when you read them the first time prior to the first class, see if they're different, see if the experience of them is different. The theme is discernment, nuance and refinement. So the ideas are aimed more at people who were already practicing path. And we have another two verses to pick out one that you find inspiring again. And then also a verse that you find challenging, or that stretches your idea of what practice is about. So one that you find inspiring, and one that stretches your idea of what practice is about, I know they've already been some of those. But if you can find that, and then I'll just remind you of the variety of ways of reading the text that we talked about last time, reading slowly, or finding a theme to carry throughout the day, things like that.

If there are no final questions or comments, I look forward to seeing you then... Paul, was your hand up?

Questioner:

Yeah. Hi. I didn't want to interrupt you. Just a quick question. You mentioned really one nice verse in your meditation soliloquy. It was about riding in a chariot and not clinging. Can you restate that verse number, please?

Kim Allen

Yeah, the ones that I, let's see the ones that I read during the meditation were verse 145, 171, and 151. Thank you so much. One that you're referring to is 171 in chapter 13.

Questioner:

Great, thank great, great, another great session. Thank you all. Thank you. Great.

Kim Allen

Well, thank you, everyone. Without further ado, then we will reconvene next week for those who can be there. And maybe we can dedicate the merit of today's session to the good work that



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Charles is doing in the Ukraine and wish that all of the merit that we generated together, be passed on to the people of Ukraine in a wish for peace. So thank you, everyone.