Living in a World of Change

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:31

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The subject of tonight's talk is living in a world of change. Today marks the six-month anniversary of September 11th, and it has been an intense time for all of us in different ways. We have witnessed countless responses to the events—to the loss of life, to the damage, and now to the war. Obviously there has been a lot of grief, sadness, and a certain amount of anger, along with arguing. But we have also seen incredible bravery, love, understanding, and forgiveness. All these human possibilities have emerged.

There was a very interesting television program last night that was filmed inside Tower One of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11th. Two young cameramen had been following a particular fire company—Ladder One of the New York City Fire Department—for several months. They said they had gotten great footage of everything except a big fire. On the morning of September 11th, they thought they had really struck pay dirt because there was a big fire. So they followed Ladder One to the World Trade Center.

They were among the first on the scene because their station house was near the center. They went right in with the firemen and were stationed in the lobby where the command post was set up, and they basically ran their video camera for the entire time they could remain in the lobby. It was quite amazing to feel that event from within.

One of the first things you noticed was how the firemen just went up the stairs without any hesitation. There were no elevators operating from the very beginning, but the firemen didn't even think twice. They just threw their hoses over their backs and started up the stairs in what they thought was going to be a big and hopefully successful rescue operation.

As the hour wore on and the cameras continued rolling, the firemen had all gone upstairs and the chiefs were the ones who stayed in the lobby to command the operation. You could see the faces of the chiefs change over the hour—from confidence and engagement and optimism to a look of being stunned. They appeared overwhelmed by the situation they found themselves in and realized it was probably going to be beyond their control. This was quite amazing to see. These were middle-aged firemen who had been doing this kind of work probably all their professional lives, and they were just lost in the enormity of it. Some firemen commented that they actually saw fear in these faces for the first time they had ever known them. Fear was not part of their vocabulary, but they saw it that morning.

Then, partway through the day, off-duty firemen started coming in, totally unprompted and uncalled. One

fire chief who had been retired for three years came down, got a suit, and headed right for the World Trade Center, saying that these were his people, his men, and he couldn't leave them alone. That level of bravery and solidarity was present through the whole operation as well. As you know, it continued throughout the day. After the buildings collapsed, the firemen and police worked around the clock to try to find survivors, to try to help anyone they could find.

But I think the most startling part of the whole video was that it filmed the lobby for about an hour. As you remember, people were jumping out of the windows very high up on the buildings because the fires were from about the 80th floor and above. About every ten minutes in the video, there would be this huge slamming noise that took place outside the building—the sound of a body hitting the ground from eighty stories up. You could see every time it happened, the firemen would be startled again and would look around through the windows. The camera never turned to show that, but you could see the impact on the firemen when it was happening. Then another ten minutes would go by and another intense slam would happen.

You could take that sound as a way to go into the suffering of those people, because what kind of terror would prompt someone to jump from eighty stories high? The jumping was a preferable alternative to what they were facing up there.

The cameras continued rolling and showed many people coming down through the stairways and leaving safely from Tower One. They also, of course, showed the collapse of both towers and people running away from the disaster. It was a sobering reminder of something I had seen many minutes of on the day itself but hadn't watched for quite a while. From this perspective, it put me right back into the feelings I had on September 11th. Again, it was very hard to be with.

What it reminded me of at this distance is the enormity of the stakes that we face in living. Sometimes we forget this. Living in a comfortable place like Marin County or Northern California, we tend to forget that life is full of extremes of joy and extremes of sorrow. Seeing video like what was on television last night reminds us of what that potential is for all of us. Life is intense.

In a way, we tend to forget about that intensity as we settle into the routine of a life. We forget that this kind of intensity and the impact it has on us is part and parcel of human life—in fact, all of sentient life.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk who trained in Vietnam and was exiled because of his protests during the war. He ended up settling in France. From time to time he would still travel back to Asia to check on what he could of his people. He came back from one trip where he had seen the suffering of boat people who were trying to flee Vietnam but who were attacked on the seas by pirates—people who were killed on the seas, who were robbed, who were not admitted to other countries because of asylum policies. After making a trip like that, because he cannot return to Vietnam itself, he came back to Paris. Looking around, he wrote that as he looked around Paris, coming back from this trip, all the suffering there seemed really minor to him.

And we can understand this from our own experience. There are certainly times when we feel centered, when we're able to respond to difficult situations with clarity and compassion rather than reactivity. And there are times when we lose that center completely, when we get swept away by the intensity of what's happening around us.

The difference isn't usually in the circumstances themselves, but in where we're operating from within ourselves. When we're operating from that centered place—what Ajahn Jimnian calls emptiness—we have access to our natural wisdom and our natural capacity for love. When we're operating from a contracted, defended place, we tend to get overwhelmed and lose access to these qualities.

The practice of the Brahmaviharas—loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity—is designed to cultivate this centered place within us. These aren't just nice feelings we're trying to generate. They're actually the natural radiance of an awakened heart, the natural expression of that empty, spacious awareness that Ajahn Jimnian talks about.

When we practice loving-kindness, for instance, we're not just trying to manufacture good feelings toward people. We're actually training ourselves to rest in that place from which love naturally flows. We're learning to find our way back to that centered space again and again, so that even in difficult circumstances, we can respond from wisdom and care rather than from fear or reactivity.

This is why these practices are so practical. They're not just about becoming nicer people, though that might be a side effect. They're about finding a way to meet the intensity of life—whether it's the intensity of September 11th or the intensity of our own personal struggles—from a place that's stable and open rather than defensive and closed.

And this is what makes all the difference. When we can find our way to that centered place, even the most difficult experiences can become opportunities for deepening rather than sources of trauma. The waves are still stormy, but we learn to surf them rather than being overwhelmed by them.

It's a nice description. I like to think of it as an empty awareness pervaded with the quality of loving kindness, or metta. Whatever description works for you, we're looking in our practice for both these qualities of seeing clearly and having an open, responsive heart to the conditions of life—the changing conditions of life.

The Brahma Viharas provide a really good roadmap to how the heartfulness side of our practice can express itself. I basically see them as a description of the wise response to the changing conditions of life. We have many responses to the changes of life that are not so skillful, that bring suffering to us immediately and that bring suffering to other people, short-term or long-term. But the Brahma Viharas are particularly there to describe what's a wise way to hold this situation, no matter what it is, and the maps of how we slide off from those wise responses.

We develop metta as the basic foundation of caring. It's an open heart that doesn't tip one way or another.

When that open heart confronts suffering, the natural response is compassion—compassion is simply caring in the light of suffering. When that open heart touches on somebody else's happiness, the natural response is this appreciative joy, this quality of becoming happy with somebody else's happiness. The Dalai Lama said that if you can do that, your chance for happiness goes up by six billion to one. So it's a good bet to make.

And then there's the equanimity that holds them all in balance. Remember that equanimity is not about being shut down. It's not closing off and being indifferent. We feel the other person's happiness. We feel their difficulties. But we hold all of that within a balanced mind so that we ourselves are not suffering on account of their situation.

You can see how equanimity really becomes the foundation for the other three. It holds metta because it lets the open heart rest. It holds compassion so that we don't become too weighed down by the suffering we're feeling. And it actually holds joy in a sane way so that we don't float off like a balloon with the uplifting energy.

The beauty is that it describes how to relate to different circumstances—basically circumstances of joy and sorrow. And the fact is that these circumstances are changing for everybody all the time. They're not just changing for you and me; they change for every being in the world, the ones who are free as well as the ones who are still struggling and working.

Even the Buddha, you'll be happy to know, had lots of back pain. Even after he was enlightened, he would sometimes say, "Ananda, my back is really killing me tonight. You give the Dharma talk. I'm going to go lie down for the evening." So the Buddha was not immune to pleasure and pain even after his awakening. He still went through the same cycles that we do.

There's one sutta I want to read a little bit from. This is from the Pali Canon, the record of the teachings of the Buddha, which were written down 500 years after his death and constitute about twenty volumes in English translation today. This is from the Anguttara Nikaya, and it's called "The Vicissitudes of Life." The Buddha is speaking:

"These eight worldly conditions, O monks, keep the world turning around. And the world turns around these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, success and failure."

I'll just read those eight again: gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, success and failure.

These eight conditions alternated for the Buddha also. You might think that after he was enlightened he had a really easy life. But it wasn't like that. There were lots of people who didn't like his teachings. There were other teachers whose words he threatened because he disagreed with them. There were power struggles within his community. His cousin was a monk and thought that he should be at the head of the community. So he actually tried to kill the Buddha and one time sent a mad elephant charging down an

alleyway trying to trample the Buddha in its path. It's said that the Buddha stopped the elephant by the force of his loving kindness.

So these eight conditions change for all of us. We're always going through ups and downs of all these different factors. If we're holding on tight, we go up and down with them. If we can learn to rest in more of a place of equanimity, then we don't get so tied to the changing fortunes.

Equanimity—the word in Pali is upeka, and the literal meaning of it, etymologically, is "looking on." We develop this faculty for looking on, even on the events of our own life.

And then that gives us the strength to look on at the events of others' lives as well.

So these fluctuating conditions happen all the time for all of us. These are the stormy waves of life, and they are also the grounds for developing the brahmaviharas. They are the very conditions that can evoke the states of metta, compassion, joy, and equanimity. So we can actually train the heart around these changing circumstances.

We have many different conditioned ways of reacting, but if we come back to the brahmaviharas, they can show us a skillful way to respond. And as we find more choice in our life, that makes a huge difference in freedom. Freedom is really about choosing how we might respond to an outer situation. Often we can't change the outer circumstances—they simply come together through various factors. We have to let that be. We have to accept that in many, many situations.

But what we do have the potential to affect is our response to the outer situation. This is where we build our practice. This is where we uncover our own freedom.

I'll share a quick example from a month-long retreat I was teaching in February. Someone came into an interview who had been sitting for a few weeks at that point. If you've observed this, when people go on retreat for a while, they get really slowed down—though it still seems like they're moving fast to them.

This meditator told me that one day she was going through the lunch line, moving really slowly. She was approaching the serving dish, just reaching out her hand very slowly and mindfully for the serving spoon, when somebody else who wasn't quite as concentrated bolted up on the other side of the table, snatched the serving spoon, and started dishing onto their plate as her hand was still moving toward it.

In just that moment, she said, this huge bolt of rage came up in her. She was so angry that somebody would overlook her practice, her mindfulness, her slowness, and just cut in front of her in line. But also because she was quite slowed down, she saw it immediately. She knew, "Oh, that's rage." And she just dropped it right on the spot. Just like that, she let it go.

That's the choice that real awareness and freedom can offer us. I often find myself driving down the freeway when somebody cuts in front of me. I haven't been going slowly or mindfully, and I spin out for a few cycles with that. So I was really inspired by this story—seeing it that clearly really opened up her

choice with the situation.

We could take a look at the first of these worldly conditions—the conditions of gain and loss—and examine how we might relate from habit and how we might relate through the brahmaviharas.

Let's take loss as a beginning. How do we usually react if we suffer a loss? My older sister died several years ago. I was pretty close with her, and her death put me into a period of depression for about two months. I felt a lot of loss and sadness after she died. It was quite unexpected—I wasn't expecting her to die at all. She hadn't been particularly ill.

I practiced every day as I do now, sitting for an hour in the morning. The interesting thing was that the practice and mindfulness didn't seem to touch the grief very much. Day after day I would sit with it, and it didn't seem to be wearing down particularly. I just kept sitting with it. It would go through some ups and downs of intensity. Then after about two months, it kind of lifted.

It was a really interesting thing for me to watch because the way it felt is that the loss or grief had its own expression that it was going to make regardless of what I wanted it to do. It had its own life to live. I think this is not uncommon—when any of us lose something, we tend to respond with grief and depression.

There are also stories from the time of the Buddha that illustrate this in an even more dramatic way. There's a famous story of a woman during his life whose name was Kisa Gotami. She was actually a cousin of his who came from the same village that he had grown up in.

She had gotten married through an arranged marriage and had not gotten on well with her in-laws. Coming in as the wife in that society, you moved into the husband's house, but the husband's parents ran the house. If they didn't like you, you were the low person on the totem pole, and your life could be miserable—and hers was.

So she was quite unhappy, but then she bore a son. Bearing a son in that culture at that time raised the woman's status tremendously, so she got some degree of satisfaction in her household life.

But then her son died.

The loss of her son when he was still young—let's say a toddler, probably three or four—drove her crazy, drove her mad with grief. She clutched her son and started going from person to person in the village asking them for medicine. "Do you have medicine that can save my son?" She wouldn't listen to any of their replies.

Finally some kindly person suggested that she go talk to the Buddha. So she went and talked to the Buddha, and he said, "I can make a medicine for your son. What I need is for you to bring me a white mustard seed from a house that hasn't known any death."

She said, "Thank goodness. My son's going to be able to be cured." So she started to go from house to house

in the village asking for a white mustard seed if they hadn't known death. And of course, what happened? Every house she went to had known death. "We lost my mother two years ago." "My daughter died last year." "We lost my sister this year." Every house she went to had known death.

Having gone to all the houses in the village, she finally understood. She buried her son in the forest. She came to the Buddha and said, "I see my son was not alone. I am not alone. Death is a condition that all of us face as people." Then, as the story went on, she ordained as a nun, practiced seriously, and came to liberation. It's the way those stories always go.

I find a couple of things interesting about this story. When she went to the Buddha and told him about her problem, he didn't give her wisdom teachings. He didn't say, "All conditioned things are impermanent. The way your son has gone is the way we're all going to go. Get with the program." He didn't say that because she couldn't have heard that at that time.

At first, I think what his teaching did was it didn't take away her grief, but it took away her madness. In this newsletter, Sylvia has a lead article that has a really lovely line. She's talking also about September 11th. She said, "Wisdom statements don't work in the middle of heartbreak. Heartbreak requires silence."

Wisdom statements don't work. Heartbreak requires silence. I think that's a beautiful pointing. When we are in the midst of heartbreak, of our loss, are we able to find that degree of silence? Because if we are, then some other movement might come out of that silence.

Particularly, I think, when we can touch that silent place—again, it's Ajahn Jumnian's awakened space—in the midst of difficulty, the flavor that naturally comes from the heart is compassion. We start to see that our thinking about the difficulty somehow often can't hold it. When things are really difficult, like September 11th, if you've lost a partner, if you've lost a child, you're having real conflict in your relationship, our thoughts about the situation can't hold that much pain. I actually think if any of us were to try to reflect on all the pain in one human life—our own human life—we couldn't hold all of that.

But the magic thing is that the silence can hold it. You could say that emptiness can hold it. Or you could say that compassion can hold it. So we discover that there's another possible response to pain, whether it's our loss or another's loss, and that is the response of compassion.

When I found the compassion practice, just as we did it tonight, I took it up quite seriously. I did actually a ten-day retreat of compassion practice, doing nothing but that from five in the morning until ten at night. It was very powerful finding that it was a new relationship to pain. Compassion, for me, brought in with it a kind of equanimity that was able to hold the pain without being disturbed by it.

Interestingly enough, compassion itself is not a suffering state. Even though the pain can be strong, when compassion starts to come out of the heart in response to the pain, there's a sweetness to compassion and it is not a state of suffering. When you look at the half-smile on the Buddha, the Buddha was deeply in touch with suffering. But that half smile is the equanimity that let him hold the suffering in a skillful way

so that he was able to respond to someone like Kisagotami and able to help and say the right thing, say the appropriate thing to her in the midst of her suffering.

One of my teachers offered a beautiful image for understanding the feeling of compassion. He likened it to sitting on a mountainside at twilight, watching the sun slowly set in the west. In that moment, there is profound beauty unfolding before you, and yet there is also a tinge of sadness—the gentle melancholy that comes with the ending of the day, the passing away of what was. He said compassion carries this same quality: there is beauty and sweetness within it, and it's perfectly natural for it to hold a touch of sadness, since it is touching suffering. But compassion itself need not become suffering.

This is the essential distinction. Compassion offers us a way of looking upon suffering without being consumed by it ourselves. Grief, like what I experienced for my sister, is itself a state of suffering that requires the support of equanimity to transform into compassion. Sometimes it's said that grief is the "near enemy" of compassion—meaning the heart slides into grief when it lacks sufficient strength, support, or equanimity to hold pain with pure compassion.

This brings us to the other side of the equation: how do we relate to gain? Let me offer a less dramatic example. When the Buddha spoke of gain and loss, he often referred to material fortune. Cast your mind back to the ancient history of internet time—two years ago, when the stock market bubble was soaring. Did you know people who were getting rich during that period? I knew a few who were riding that wave of prosperity.

How did it feel to witness their good fortune? Were you able to feel completely happy and joyful about their happiness, even when you hadn't made the same investments? Or was there perhaps a small tinge of disgruntlement? A quiet voice saying, "I wish it weren't going quite so well for them. I wouldn't mind if their stock had risen fifty percent, but tripling?"

The Brahmaviharas invite us to feel genuinely happy with another's happiness—and we're not asked to judge whether that happiness makes sense to us. We're called to tune into their joy, not our version of what should bring joy. If they feel happy because their investments have flourished, can we simply connect with that happiness and enjoy it alongside them? This is mudita, appreciative joy, the third of the Brahmaviharas.

But often the heart slides into that subtle disgruntlement, which the Buddha called envy—the far enemy of appreciative joy. This happens when someone experiences happiness that feels like "too much," as though their abundance somehow diminishes our own potential for joy. It's as if happiness were a limited resource, and their having more means there's less available for us.

So when a friend experiences gain—a new relationship, a better job, material fortune, whatever form it takes—can we genuinely celebrate with them? The classical commentaries note that appreciative joy is often the most difficult of the four Brahmaviharas to practice, precisely because of envy's persistent

influence.

But consider what happened when the bubble burst and your friend lost that fortune. What arose in your heart then? Was it pure compassion? Or was there perhaps a touch of satisfaction, a sense that "this is justice—those gains never should have been so high in the first place"? Did you find yourself, even slightly, enjoying their downfall?

This tendency toward satisfaction in another's suffering, however subtle, is what's called cruelty. Cruelty is the heart's capacity to take pleasure in another person's pain, whether great or small. It is the far enemy of compassion—its direct opposite.

As we learn to witness loss, can we hold compassion as our gold standard? Whether the loss belongs to us or another, whether the pain is ours or theirs, can we meet it with compassion? And can we develop sensitivity to those moments when the heart begins sliding either into grief unsupported by equanimity, or into cruelty?

Cruelty is a harsh word, and none of us wants to be seen as cruel, yet I believe we all carry this tendency. Notice how often in media reports over these past months there has been a kind of reveling in military operations from all sides. "Hundreds were killed today in our action in Afghanistan"—delivered with a tone of satisfaction. Or from opposing voices: "Thank goodness we finally got some American servicemen—it's what they deserved." This taking pleasure in death and destruction is another manifestation of cruelty.

This is true whether one supports the war or not. This is still cruelty—enjoying the suffering of another.

With delight, the delight of happiness and gain, the far enemy is envy. The near enemy is becoming overexcited. We can see this with our own gain very easily. Do you notice when something good comes into your life, it's very hard to just hang out with that in silence? Sometimes it's harder to hang out with happiness in silence than it is with difficulty.

What happens, I think, is our minds tend to latch on to the happiness as a possession and then build on what we're going to do with life now that we have this possession. This mental interference of thought with happiness corrupts it. It undermines the happiness because we start to spin out in our thoughts about it and we can't just feel the pure joy of the thing. This is called elation—the English translation of the Buddha's term. Elation is the near enemy of appreciative joy, and it really undermines the impact of the joy itself.

So these are the roadmaps offered by the Brahmavihāras for these changing alternations of pleasure and pain, of gain and loss, of praise and blame, of success and failure. When we encounter pain, can we meet it with compassion? When we encounter joy, can we hold it with an appreciation that resonates with that joy? And can we look for these slides away that move into grief or cruelty, or the sliding away that moves into elation or into envy?

Because all the Brahmavihāras are supported by equanimity, as we find our home in them more and more, we really come to a greater balance with all the change that's in the world. Like Ajahn Jemini, we're not so moved by it. We don't have to reach out and get entangled with it as much. But our heart is still very responsive. It's not that we're turned off or cold, but the entanglement with it really tends to get cut down.

As we're not getting so entangled in the ups and downs, our motivation can really shift from getting to giving. I think this is really the start of the bodhisattva path, the path where our practice, where our life really starts to have a dimension of not just being for ourselves, but being for the benefit of all beings. That moves from being a cliché to being an actual motivating reality for us.

I'll close with this quotation from Śāntideva, an Indian Buddhist teacher of the 8th century, one of the Dalai Lama's favorite quotations: "For as long as space endures and as long as sentient beings remain, may I too abide to dispel the unhappiness of this world."

We have about ten minutes left. If you have any reflections, comments, discussion, or questions, I'll open it up.

"After 9/11 happened, our president used the word justice. And with everything we've talked about, how does justice and the word justice play a part in this? Is it justice to take another's life?"

How can we understand justice in light of the emphasis on compassion and non-harming in the Buddha's teachings?

First, I think the Buddha was very dedicated to a life of non-violence. You can get a sense of how that might show up in the world today by the Dalai Lama and the way that he speaks and teaches.

This is from the newsletter and fits here. At the end of a talk, someone from the audience asked the Dalai Lama, "Why didn't you fight back against the Chinese?"—because this also could be a form of justice, to fight back against an invader. The Dalai Lama looked down, swung his feet just a bit, then looked back up at us and said with a gentle smile, "Well, war is obsolete, you know." Then after a few moments, his face grave, he said, "Of course the mind can rationalize fighting back, but the heart, the heart would never understand. Then you would be divided in yourself, the heart and the mind, and the war would be inside you."

I think that might be taken as a fairly accurate pointer to the way that the Buddha might answer the question if he were here today. The Buddha felt justice was appropriate. In the rules he set up for the community of monks and nuns, there were offenses described against those rules, with specific punishments for each offense proportional to the transgression. Some involved being excommunicated from the order altogether. Others involved lesser penances.

So the idea of justice is in the Buddha's teachings, but I think he would look very long and hard to find

nonviolent ways of coming to justice. I obviously don't have any easy answer for what that would mean in terms of the world situation today or Afghanistan.

But I do have the feeling that the leaders of our country and the world have not put as much time into exploring nonviolent alternatives and tend to move rather quickly to violent alternatives.

"Any other comments, questions? Yes, please."

"I have a question that's a little off the topic. It's about non-harming. And I always have a problem with refraining from killing when it gets to a level of insects. And it sounds funny, but we had termites in our house, and I couldn't justify selling the house to someone else and I couldn't justify to myself leaving the shelter for my family either, and yet I felt guilty about killing them. How do you decide when what you're doing is really rational or when you're fooling yourself?"

The question is about the precept on not killing and the attitude of non-harming and what to do with insects in the house with termites, for example. It's a real question for serious Buddhists.

I'll tell you a little story. The Minneapolis Zen Center years ago had cockroaches, and they were infesting the meditation hall. New people didn't want to come in and practice because cockroaches would run over their legs. So the senior students thought, well, we'll ask the Zen master. He must know what to do about this. So they went up to see the Zen master who was Katagiri Roshi and explained the situation and said, "Roshi, what should we do?" And he said, "I'm not going to tell you."

So what the senior students decided to do was to have the meditation hall exterminated. They killed the cockroaches so that meditators would come and practice. And they felt that was the right alternative. I think many other people who are good, sincere Buddhists come to a similar kind of decision.

What I think is that there are times when killing insects may be the right option for any one of us. It may be the option we choose. And it doesn't take away from the fact that we're breaking the precept. And in breaking the precept, there's a certain amount of unskillful action going on and we'll have repercussions in our life. I believe that happens.

So I hold the precepts not as an absolute commandment, but as a guideline to use in skillfully choosing your own route in this situation.

One other thing I wanted to say—this gets back to the first question also—I think there are Buddhists who have different views on pacifism. I think there are responsible Buddhists who would say that the Tibetans should have defended their country against the Chinese. And there were certainly Tibetan fighters who wanted to do that. The Dalai Lama did not encourage them or would not support them. But I think that one can be a conscientious Buddhist and believe that at times war might be the right response. World War II certainly comes closer to that situation than today's war.

But what I also want to add is along with the situation with insects, I think the situation with killing

humans is the same. I think there are huge karmic repercussions from the taking of human life. And those are not dismissed because one believes that it's the right course and it's justified.

"One last comment, please."

I've heard of that sutra too. The story that I heard went that there was a pirate on board a ship who was going to kill all 500 people on the ship. And one person on the ship killed the pirate, thereby taking one life but saving 500 lives. The scripture, which is from the Mahayana—so it means it didn't come out of the mouth of the Buddha, but came out of very enlightened beings centuries later—the scripture goes on to say that that being did suffer the karmic consequence of taking a life, which was that he spent one moment in hell. But then he was immediately reborn after that one moment in a very happy life.

The Buddha also said that the workings of karma are one of the four things that can drive you crazy if you think about them too much. So I would encourage us to take the messages from the suttas and kind of leave it there.

So I'd like to just close the evening. We've come to 9:15 with this dedication of merit from the Tibetan, having the sense that we want to take whatever goodness has come out of our time together this evening and have that goodness be shared with all beings everywhere for their welfare, for their happiness, for their freedom.

Through the merit of this practice, may all come to awakening. Overcoming the obstacle of my own misconduct, may I free all beings from the ocean of existence with its stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death. May all beings be freed.

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