Ten Unwholesome Actions

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 1:04:10

The question I'd like to consider tonight is how we can be happy in our lives. How we can manifest our intentions of goodwill and loving kindness in our relationships, in our work situations, in our interactions with the world. The question really is how we connect our meditation practice with our lives.

In one verse of the Dhammapada, which is a collection of verses of the Buddhist teachings, the Buddha summed up all forty-five years of his teaching in this one verse: "Refrain from unwholesome actions, do good, purify the mind. This is the teachings of all the Buddhas."

The last line is interesting because he was saying that this is the same teaching of all the Buddhas in the past and all the Buddhas to come in the future, and so it really points to the timeless nature of the Dhamma.

It's said that what most moved the Buddha after his enlightenment to begin teaching was seeing so many beings who were seeking happiness, wanting happiness, and yet doing the very things in their lives that cause suffering. Of course, we can see this very same pattern over and over again in our own lives. There's a wonderfully pointed teaching by Shantideva, whose great work was a guide to a bodhisattva's way of life, where he said, "We are like senseless children. We shrink from suffering, but love its causes." When I read that, it struck me as being right on. We don't like suffering but we get caught up again and again in the causes of suffering.

So the Buddha, out of really great compassion, took a further step in clarifying the issue—in case we're not sure what actions cause suffering, in case we have confusion about this, even though in many respects it's very obvious. He laid out the actions which cut us off from wisdom, which cut us off from compassion. He laid out the actions that are the cause of suffering for ourselves and other people. It's a very straightforward and powerful teaching.

So what are the unwholesome actions? The Buddha very specifically said these actions cause suffering. There's just such a power in it, very unambiguous. He highlighted ten actions, ten unskillful actions. There are three actions of the body, four actions of speech, and three of the mind.

Now most of these are quite familiar to us, so it's not that for the most part we'll be hearing anything new. But given our propensity to shrink from suffering but love its causes, we need to hear it again and again. It's like planting and watering and nurturing the seeds of this understanding so that this wisdom is activated in moments of intention. When we're about to act, can this wisdom, can this understanding come forth? It helps awaken us from the cycle of our habituated actions.

The first of the unwholesome actions of body is, again, very obvious: not killing, not physically harming other beings or ourselves. We take this on many levels. Not killing people—just think how different the world would be if people just followed that. Sometimes I think it's like the Buddha is teaching kindergarten. Don't kill. Somehow we need to hear it. It's so obvious, and yet we look around the world and people are not understanding this.

Not killing animals for sport or pleasure. Beginning to really respect life. Not killing beings because we don't like the way they look—you know, those little insects and creepy crawlies.

I had a very strong experience of this in my days in India. In the summer months, it would get very hot in Bodh Gaya, which is on the plains. It would go up to 120 degrees, and so anybody who could left for the mountains. I'd gone up with friends and just rented this basic cabin up in the mountains in a hill station called Dalhousie. It had spectacular views of the high peaks, but it was a pretty primitive cabin. There was no running water inside, no plumbing, and lots of big, hairy spiders, which would just hang out on the ceiling of my bedroom.

When I first went into this cottage, it was very disconcerting. But there was really nothing to do. I wasn't going to kill them, and they were a little too big to move outside. So we just learned to coexist. The spiders had their place on the ceiling and I had my place down below. It was amazing—after not a long time, it was totally fine. Just coexisting and respecting each other's life.

And yet that's so different from our culture here. In our culture, something a little unpleasant, something we don't like in the house—take out the can of Raid, kill it. And nobody thinks anything of it. So when we take a look at this first unwholesome action, we really begin to bring it down to more refined levels.

Can we actually connect, not just conceptually but experientially, with the commonality of life, the commonality of the life process? This engenders a very different feeling in us than when we unthinkingly respond with "I don't like it, kill it."

Sometimes we're faced with difficult situations where the solution is not simple. What does one do in trying to eradicate malaria and spraying for the malaria mosquitoes, or other diseases that are insect-borne? Or carpenter ants are eating up your house. What do you do? Do we just say, "Oh, be happy, be happy"? Sometimes we're really faced with choices that are not easy. They're real ethical dilemmas, and we simply try to weigh, in some wise way, the best course of action.

What I feel is important is that even in those cases where for whatever reason it feels necessary to take the life of some beings—if that's the conclusion we come to after some consideration, some wise reflection—can we do it from a place of compassion rather than a place of aversion? Rather than a place of ill will or hatred? Understanding what we're doing and really having compassion for the suffering.

All of these things require a great deal of sensitivity, a great deal of consciousness being brought to them. That's the first of the unwholesome actions: killing. The Buddha said to refrain from it. It causes suffering

to ourselves, suffering to others.

The second of the unwholesome actions is stealing. The Buddha said don't steal, don't take what is not given, don't take what is not offered. But we can really expand this and see how it plays out in so many arenas of life—not being dishonest in work situations, for example. Last year I saw a documentary about the whole Enron scandal called *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*. It was unbelievable that these very smart people were so driven by greed that they destroyed the lives of thousands and thousands of people. It was amazing to see the headspace they were in, leading to the actions they took.

We may not be quite on the level of Enron, but just in our own lives, in our own work situations, are there areas that are a little problematic in terms of just being straightforward and honest? We really want to look at this. Are we taking more than we need? This can be extended to exploiting resources. We see that both culturally and individually. It can come down even to smaller, very personal actions when we expand this notion of what stealing means. It doesn't have to be blatant stealing. It can simply be taking what's not necessary rather than giving—that energy of taking rather than offering.

I had the experience of being on retreat here at IMS, going into the lunch line. This particular day they had one of my favorite IMS dishes: sesame spinach. There was a little sign in front: "Moderation please." So I'm going through the line, seeing desire, and the thought in my mind—the first immediate thought—was "How much can I take and still be moderate?" I kind of pushed the limit a bit. Then about thirty seconds or a minute later, I was overcome with guilt. Did I take too much? The people behind me won't have enough! The whole lunch period I was eating lunch, always looking back to see. It was just a small thing, but when we're watching our minds, we see that our sensitivity to wholesome and unwholesome actions can get very refined. That's the beauty of awareness, the beauty of our practice.

So when the Buddha says to refrain from stealing as an unwholesome action, don't think of it just as the obvious and blatant stealing, which we probably don't do. See how it might apply, how that principle might apply in our more ordinary interactions.

Refraining from killing, refraining from stealing. The third of the unwholesome actions that the Buddha said causes suffering to ourselves and suffering to others is sexual misconduct. Now this means different things at different levels. Sexual misconduct for monks or nuns, or people on retreat, means being celibate, refraining from sexual activity. But for lay people in the world, it's not what it means. It really means avoiding sexual activity that causes harm. Traditionally it's talked about in terms of adultery, or deception, or encouraging other people to break vows of commitment. It could mean inappropriate relations between doctors and patients, or teachers and students, or therapists and clients. There are many arenas where sexual activity is inappropriate.

It's important to really look at and investigate this energy within us, because it is very powerful. It's often when we feel most alive. When sexual passion, sexual energy is strong in us, it's a tremendously energizing, powerful force.

Larry Rosenberg, who is one of the founding teachers at the Cambridge Meditation Center and is now around seventy-five, made a comment at a teacher meeting a little while ago when this issue came up. He simply asked, "Is there anybody who in their life has not made a fool of themselves over sex?" And everybody smiled in acknowledgement of the truth of that. It's powerful. It's a powerful energy. And the Buddha is saying we need to pay attention. We need to become conscious of this.

This is one of my favorite Burmese-English translation moments. Sayadaw U Pandita was speaking about this, going on and on, perhaps speaking for about ten minutes in Burmese. And then the translator said just four words in English. These four words really stuck in my mind: "Lust cracks the brain."

It does. It does. When it's strong, it's so easy for it to be overpowering, and we do all kinds of things. So the Buddha is saying, recognizing this as a powerful energy, learn about it. Really investigate the nature of desire and see what's skillful, see what's unskillful.

Being on retreat, in a surprising way, is an opportunity to learn a great deal about desire—both sexual desire and other kinds of desires—precisely because we're not acting on them. In that space, it gives us a chance, a space of clarity, to really investigate. We can see: What is the nature of it? How is it working in my mind, in my body?

On retreat, as desires arise—and they will arise for different people at different times, sometimes quite strongly—it's a chance to see their impermanent, changing nature. The desire arises, it's there, it's there, it can be there for quite a while, and then it goes. We learn that we don't have to suppress it and we don't need to express it. We learn how to create the space to feel it and still have an understanding, still have the wisdom to see when it's appropriate to act on it and when it is not. We come to a real understanding.

So when sexual desire arises in the mind—and by extension any other kind of desire—how is our mind relating to it? That's the question. Do we indulge the fantasies because they're pleasant? It's very easy to spend a nice hour just indulging in pleasant fantasy. Or for some people, desire arises and there is fear: "I don't want to deal with this." We feel ourselves pulling back with a certain fear of feeling it.

Through our practice, through the cultivation of awareness, we learn the middle way. We're not suppressing it, we're not expressing it—we're just letting it arise, seeing its impermanent nature, letting it pass away.

In the book *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy, Anna is this beautiful married woman, beautiful in all ways and passionate, having a love affair with a very handsome guardsman, Count Vronsky. Eventually they run off together, and at a certain point the romance begins to pall, especially on his part. This is Vronsky's experience of the nature of desire—really, by extension, Tolstoy's:

"Vronsky, meanwhile, in spite of the complete realization of what he had so long desired, was not perfectly happy. He soon felt that the realization of his desires gave him no more than a grain of sand out of the mountain of happiness he had expected. It showed him the mistake men make in picturing to

themselves happiness as the realization of their desires."

I read that and thought: the Buddha could have said that. We make a fundamental mistake. We think that genuine, lasting happiness is going to come through the fulfillment of our desires. And it never does.

This is not something we want to accept on some philosophical basis. It's really to look in our own experience, and that's the beauty of retreat. Desires are going to arise of all kinds. Really look and investigate.

See what it's about. See what that energy is about. See how desires arise, how they pass away. This is a chance to learn about this very powerful force.

So these are the three unwholesome actions of the body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. The Buddha says refrain from these. They are the cause of suffering.

There are four unwholesome actions of speech. This in itself is pretty remarkable, and it highlights how powerful a force speech is in our lives. So much suffering comes from our lack of attention to the way we speak. The Buddha singled out right speech as one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation. He's saying right speech is important. And yet how often in our practice and our lives do we relegate it to some secondary field of endeavor? We think the real practice of liberation is sitting or walking or being in silent retreat. Of course, this is obviously an important piece of it all, but the Buddha is saying speech is a very powerful force. It can contribute in a major way either to our suffering or our happiness, so pay attention.

And again, he went further. He laid it all out for us. The beauty of the Buddha's teachings is just how clear they are. He says so straightforwardly what we need to pay attention to. We know from our own experience how speech so often conditions the nature of our relationships. It conditions our own minds. The way we speak reinforces patterns in our minds. It conditions karmic consequences for the future.

So what are the four unwholesome kinds of speech? Again, the first is very obvious: it's lying. The Buddha says don't lie. Don't kill. Don't steal. Take care with sexuality. Don't lie. They're such obvious things, but we do need to hear them and reflect on them.

There are many kinds of false speech, many levels of false speech. There might be slight exaggerations. Or humorous untruths, where we say something untrue just as a way of humor. Or falsehoods whose motivation might be self-protection in some way—we say what's untrue out of a misguided idea that we're protecting something in ourselves or protecting something in others. And sometimes there are very deliberate lies with malicious intent, where the intention is to cause harm, to cause divisiveness.

In any of these situations, from the small little exaggerations to the really big lies, a very interesting question for us to reflect on is: why do we lie? Why would we say that which is untrue? It becomes very interesting to explore the motivations behind false speech. Is it greed for something? Or desire for some kind of self-aggrandizement? Or fear of rejection, or jealousy? There could be so many different

motivations where we shade the truth in one way or another.

It's said that in the life of the Bodhisattva, from the time that the previous Buddha, Dipankara, had prophesied that our Buddha would one day become fully awakened—in all those many lifetimes he was called the Bodhisattva, countless lifetimes perfecting the qualities. It's said that he committed many kinds of misdeeds. It's not that he was perfectly pure right from the beginning.

He struggled with a lot of the same forces that we do. But it is said that even though he committed many misdeeds and suffered the karmic consequences of them, the one thing he didn't do from the time of that prediction was this: he never said that which was untrue. It's like planting the flag of truthful speech. I find that very inspiring. And it's also a little surprising to me how something that seems so obviously good, and in one way so obviously simple, should also be so difficult.

I don't think of myself really as being one of the grand liars of these times. But when I watch my speech, it's just striking to me—the little ways untruths can come out. So it's very challenging and powerful just to make truth a standard.

One of my favorite stories about this has become part of IMS lore. It's about the tendency we have to cover for ourselves. Many years ago, there was a yogi on a three-month retreat who had walked into the big walk-in refrigerator and freezer behind the kitchen. It was in the evening, and his hand was in a box of almonds or whatever it was that was in there. A staff person happened to walk in. The staff person was very nice. He saw the yogi and said, "Can I help you?" And I can just picture this scene—hands in the box. "Can I help you?" "Oh, I'm just looking for the maintenance man." The first thing that comes to mind. I think we can all relate to that, that first impulse to self-protection.

So it's just to watch. And of course the great help to us is if we can watch without judgment. There are going to be lots of situations, either very obvious ones or some very subtle ones, but can we pay attention so we do refine our commitment to speaking the truth? It takes practice and it also takes a certain quality of courage to be that honest with ourselves. And that's a gift of the practice.

So falsehood or lying is the first of the unwholesome aspects of speech. The second unwholesome kind of speech the Buddha pointed to is harsh speech, or angry, aggressive speech. It's impactful. Words have a great power to harm, and we see this happen in so many situations in our lives when words that are used actually cause harm to others. We need to really be conscious of the energy of our speech and the motivation behind it.

How do we feel when we have angry, aggressive words coming towards us? What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of that? Very often, in some way we feel hurt, or we get defensive, putting up some kind of protective barrier. It's not a very conducive field for open communication. It doesn't serve the purpose of actually connecting with another being.

The point here is that it's not to stuff or suppress our feelings. If we're feeling angry or upset or whatever

is going on in us and something needs to be communicated, it's not that we just suppress it all and pretend, "Oh, I'm not angry," and then have it come out in very passive-aggressive ways. It's to acknowledge the feeling in ourselves but have enough space, enough awareness, enough mindfulness so that we can then communicate that in an effective way rather than simply venting it. We need to be able to modulate the quality of our speech.

One very helpful guideline that I've found to be very powerful in my life, in the practice of this, is to keep in mind whether what I say is creating harmony or creating divisiveness, and letting that be the measure. This plays out a lot in the third kind of unwholesome speech. There's falsehood or lying. There's harsh language. The third kind of unwholesome speech the Buddha talked about is gossip or backbiting—words that cause disharmony between people.

An interesting question, because gossip is so common. This is not a rare thing. This is a major part of how we speak. We often speak about other people. And it's not always malicious, but sometimes it may not be the most wholesome thing. The question that I find very interesting, as I see the impulse in my mind to speak about others, is: what's the delight in it?

Why do we take delight in it? What's happening? What's the motivation in our hearts? Does it reaffirm some sense of self? Do we somehow feel better about ourselves when we're speaking about a third person? Is there some ego gratification? It's worth examining.

I had one very striking experience. Somebody had come to do an interview with me. He was writing a book about different spiritual teachers and scenes in America. He was a very skillful interviewer. He came up, we were sitting in my house, he had his tape recorder going, and we were just talking about different things. Then he started asking me what I thought about many of my colleagues. And I could just feel that impulse to give my two cents about everyone.

It was so interesting. Fortunately, I was mindful enough to see the impulse, to see it. It would have been so much fun—just, "Oh yeah, that person, and that person." But I saw it, fortunately. I could see it in my mind, and I said, "No, this is not skillful. I don't want to go here."

When I saw the book come out, and everything we had talked about was right there in print, I was so grateful for the restraint. I would have been very embarrassed and ashamed if that had actually appeared in the book.

So we want to take care, and we want to see what that impulse is about—to speak about others. And again, to be very clear, even when we do speak about other people, as we often do, what is the motivation? Is it to cause division between others, to cause separation? Or not? Is it in the service of friendship? Is it in the service of harmony? We need to pay attention because these patterns happen very automatically.

The last of the unwholesome patterns of speech—it's not speaking falsely or lying, not harsh speech, not gossip or backbiting—the last one is perhaps the most difficult of all. The Buddha said to refrain from

useless talk. There's a great word in Pali—you know, the kind of word where the sound conveys the meaning? The word is *sampapalapa*. And *sampapalapa* is just what it sounds like. It's useless talk. Our words become worthless.

It's really fascinating to watch. Here on retreat, of course, there's not much opportunity for it. But when you're back in the world, just hanging out with friends, talking—so often I'll see something come up in my mind to say that is completely useless. It doesn't serve anything at all. It's just useless. It's some *sampapala pa*.

When I can see it before it comes out the mouth, when I can kind of see it and recognize, "I don't need to say that. This is not necessary"—it always feels so good. I relax back into a place of greater ease. And then when I'm not mindful enough, out it comes.

It's a great practice. Speech is a great practice. A great question to ask with respect to speech is: Is it necessary? Is it necessary to say this or not? As we practice in this way, our hearts and our minds actually become much more peaceful. We're just not giving voice to all this useless chatter. And as I'm sure you've noticed being on retreat, there's plenty of useless chatter going on in the mind already. Our speech conditions that. As we refrain from this kind of speech, our minds and our hearts get more peaceful. So it's a powerful practice.

One thing I want to highlight here: the Buddha listed ten unwholesome actions, saying these actions cause suffering. Four of the ten have to do with speech. I think this is worthy of our attention. This is not just some little side piece of the path—this is a big piece of what causes suffering in our lives and how we can refrain from it.

The last of the unwholesome actions are the three actions of mind. The first of these is covetousness—just the mind that's coveting, that's wanting, wanting what others may have. It's that feeling of just never having enough. Covetousness is like that hungry ghost mentality, always wanting what others may have. It's the opposite of that quality of mudita, sympathetic or empathetic joy, that takes delight in the happiness of others. Rather than coveting what others have, we're actually enjoying their happiness, finding joy and delight in it.

Covetousness always leaves us unfulfilled. And it can lead to so many other unwholesome states—jealousy, envy, and then actions based on that. So we want to really look in our minds, see when this is arising, recognize it, be mindful of it, and then let it go, choosing not to act on it.

There's one little story—it's just one of my favorites, so I must read it. It's about covetousness and how that can lead to other unwholesome mind states. The writer Anne Lamott was describing how difficult it is to deal with the triumphs of other writers, particularly if one of them happens to be a friend. This is her quote: "It can wreak just the tiniest bit of havoc with your self-esteem to find that you are hoping for small bad things to happen to this friend—for, say, her head to blow up."

You know how it is when somebody else gets something that we want or that we're desiring. It's not to judge ourselves. The Buddha is pointing these out because they're common to all of us. These things arise at different times in most of us. So it's not about self-judgment—it's about the interest in seeing, the interest in really becoming aware and recognizing that we can make choices.

The ninth of the unwholesome actions, the second unwholesome action of mind, is ill will. We've talked a lot about this. Ill will means impatience, irritation, anger, annoyance, fear—all kinds of aversion. It arises when we don't get what we want. We want something, we don't get it, so aversion arises. Or we do get what we don't want—like pain or discomfort or unpleasant mind states. Something arises and we don't want it, and that causes aversion. It could be difficult situations; aversion arises in difficult circumstances in the world or with other people.

So often there is a tendency to blame others for how we feel. We feel aversion and it's somebody else's fault. Years ago I was in a relationship with a woman who I'm still very good friends with. One of the highlights of our relationship was when we were having a little disagreement, bordering on an argument. At one point she turns to me and says, "Stop making me feel aversion." I must say, I just started to laugh—which probably didn't help. But it was such a classic expression of something we all feel: "Stop making me feel this way."

Well, nobody makes us feel any way. How we feel is completely up to us, even in very difficult circumstances. How we feel about it is up to us. And this is a tremendously liberating insight.

Just as an example of this, and this ties into speech: the Buddha also talked about listening, how to listen. This is what he said, because there are five courses of speech that others may use when they address you. People may speak to us in five different ways.

Their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or connected with harm, spoken with a mind of loving-kindness or with a mind of inner hate. "Here, bhikkhus, you should train yourself thus: Our minds will remain unaffected. We shall utter no unskillful words. We shall abide compassionate for their welfare with a mind of loving-kindness."

That's a pretty high bar. Somebody speaking to us with a mind filled with hate, with an intention to harm, untimely, untruthfully—and you should train yourself thus: our minds will remain unaffected, we shall utter no unskillful words, we shall abide compassionate for their welfare. There's a tremendous lesson here—that how we feel, how we respond, how we relate is up to us. It's not dependent on the external condition. And that's the great power of the practice. That's what we're learning.

So there's covetousness, there's ill will—these are the unwholesome actions of mind. The last of them, the last unwholesome action of mind, is called wrong view. And wrong view has different aspects. One aspect of wrong view is not understanding, not considering the law of karma—understanding that our actions have consequences. Wrong view is the belief that there is no result from skillful or unskillful actions.

The Buddha is saying something very direct here about how we need to understand the world. He's saying it is wrong view, it is misperception, if we think there is no result from skillful or unskillful actions. When this wrong view is present, when we don't understand action and its result, it's like trying to navigate through the world, to navigate through our lives, without understanding what brings happiness and what causes suffering. We go down so many wrong streets, wrong directions, so many missteps because we don't understand, because we have wrong views. When wrong view is present in the mind, we don't stop to consider the results of our actions. We don't consider where the actions are leading and whether or not we want to go there. So wrong view is a very powerful and potentially dangerous force in the mind. It obscures clear seeing and it's the cause of a lot of suffering.

The other aspect of wrong view—one is not seeing or understanding that skillful and unskillful actions bear fruit. The other crucial aspect of wrong view, and one that is at the root cause of so much suffering, is the deeply conditioned view or concept of self. We have and will continue to talk a lot about this—the idea, the belief, the view that there is someone behind experience to whom it's all happening.

We create this mental construct of a self, an "I." We call it, name it Joseph, or Mioshen, or Annie, or whoever—each one of us. And then we reinforce this view of self every time we identify with arising experience. We identify with a thought, we identify with an emotion—my thought, my feeling, I'm sad, I'm happy, my pain. But the "I" and "mine" is extra. We're adding that to the bare fact of the experience.

In our practice, we begin to get pretty clear glimpses—and by now probably you've all had some taste of this. Yes, the sensations are just coming and going. The thoughts are just coming and going. The emotions are just coming and going. We begin to get a sense, even just a little bit, of this selfless nature. It's just empty phenomena rolling on.

But the last hideout of self, and the one that's quite difficult to see, is the identification we have with the knowing, with the awareness. We can see all the changing objects coming and going and get some sense of them being not-self. But through that identification with awareness, we create the sense of a witness or an observer. "Well, that's who I am." So that's kind of the last holdout of this view of self.

If you remember from last week's talk, we talked about the difference between consciousness, awareness, and wisdom. In that context, awareness and mindfulness were used synonymously. So this goes to the question that came up this morning. In this context, awareness or mindfulness and consciousness—all of them are conditioned states arising and passing away, not I, not self. And the Buddha is very clear in his description of how consciousness is dependently arising. It arises dependent on conditions, and we will talk more about that.

So in this context, awareness or mindfulness is a conditioned state of mind, just like everything else—just like concentration or wisdom or generosity or love or fear or anger. They're all conditioned states. There are some schools of Buddhism, though, and some schools even within Theravada, that speak of an unconditioned awareness, which is something apart from consciousness and the aggregates.

And this question—is awareness conditioned or unconditioned—has been hotly debated for thousands of years. So I would suggest that you not spend too much time on this question. Rather than draw conclusions, rather than spin out in your thoughts—is it conditioned? Is it unconditioned? What did the Buddha mean?—as a way of not getting caught in all that, and of staying aligned with fundamental right view, the view of selflessness, if we simply practice not clinging to anything, whatever arises, not to cling—not to cling to the different objects, not to cling to knowing, not to cling to awareness—the mind of not clinging...

There's a Tibetan teaching that says, "If you do not cling, whatever arises is naturally freed." And this is a beautiful image. If we don't cling, whatever arises is naturally freed. We can stay right in that experience of freedom in the moment. And we don't need to get caught up in the philosophic debates anymore.

At one point in my practice in Bodh Gaya, I'd been there for a while and I just had dropped into this wonderful place. It was like a non-dual awareness, and I was doing walking meditation and it just became so effortless and free. There was no separation of awareness and body. I started kind of dancing around the roof of the Burmese Vihara where I was staying, and couldn't wait to tell my teacher. So I go running to Munindraji and I was telling him how free I was. And all he said to me was, "Don't recondition your mind." It was a great teaching. Don't recondition your mind with another conclusion. Just be in the experience and let the Dharma unfold. So I just pass that on to you in terms of drawing conclusions. Stay in the openness. Stay in the not knowing.

So these are the ten unwholesome actions and what we should refrain from: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, harsh speech, gossip, useless speech, covetousness, ill will, and wrong view. It was really out of great compassion that the Buddha pointed these out to us. It's like putting a sign on a beach that says, "Danger, Strong Undertow"—a warning sign that tells us to be careful. That's what the Buddha is doing here. He's putting up the sign: Be careful. These are the actions that lead to suffering.

So we need to internalize it, to investigate it. It's not simply a question of believing it. Really look at all of these things. Internalize it and reflect on it in an appropriate way.

In this clear and very straightforward teaching, the Buddha helps us understand freedom with a very mature and long-ranging vision. Freedom is not about doing what we want when we want. That's really addiction. Freedom is in that place of wisdom where we can make choices, where we can choose wisely, understanding what is the cause of suffering and what is not.

I'd like to close with a few verses from the Dhammapada about happiness. The Buddha is telling us, what causes happiness for us? He said: Happiness is having friends when need arises. Happiness is contentment with whatever there is. Happiness is merit at the end of one's life. Happiness is the abandoning of all sufferings. In the world, respect for one's mother is happiness, as is respect for one's father. In the world, respect for renunciants is happiness. Happiness is virtue lasting through old age. Happiness is steadfast faith. Happiness is the attainment of wisdom. Not doing the unskillful is happiness.

Let's sit for a couple of minutes. There's one Tibetan aspiration: May you be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. May you have happiness and the causes of happiness.

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