Papañca, Part 2

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:28:29

We'll begin this session, as usual, with a fifteen-minute sitting. Find some relaxed and alert posture and settle in. Maybe begin just by taking a few deep breaths as a way of settling into the body. As you close your eyes or lower them, soften the eyes. Relax the shoulders. Relax the jaw and the chest and the belly. Settle into the awareness of the whole body posture. Just sit and know you're sitting. If you found it helpful, you can use that phrase, "there is a body." It's a kind of mental note, just reminding oneself to settle into the awareness of the whole body posture. There is a body. Feeling the whole body sitting.

With that open framework, be mindful of what you become aware of within it. This would include sounds that are appearing and disappearing, the sensations of the body breathing. Be mindful of any other strong bodily sensations that call your attention within that larger framework—there is a body. Just feeling them, being with them as they change, and resting again in the awareness "there is a body" when they're no longer predominant.

Within that framework—there is a body—where sounds are maybe coming, sensations of the body breathing, other predominant bodily sensations—also be alert and mindful for the arising, the appearance of thoughts or images in the mind. Notice where in that process you become aware of them. Are you aware of the thought after it's already over, in the middle, or just as it arises? See it without judgment, just noticing how your process is unfolding.

Also notice, as objects of attention, any predominant mind states or emotions that may be present. Maybe one of the hindrances—desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness, doubt. It may be more positive mind states: calm, peace, contentment, interest. Just notice the particular mind state or emotion. Noting them is helpful as a way of being with them without identifying with them. Settle back in the awareness of the frame "there is a body," and then be mindful of whatever appears, whatever arises within that frame, noticing its changing nature.

When you're ready, you can slowly, gently open your eyes. And again, be mindful of seeing. Even perhaps for a moment or two, just note "seeing, seeing." It helps to reinforce the possibility of being mindful as we're seeing, going through the day. This itself is its own interesting exercise.

So, we continue with our discussion. This is talk "Papañca II," and we'll explore another aspect of it—hopefully a freeing aspect.

As you know, in the last couple of days we've discussed in some detail these powerful proliferating

tendencies of mind and how they construct our reality, how they construct our lived experience. As you now know, they are all very much rooted in the tendency of craving, conceit, and wrong view, which are all rooted in the sense of self. Not only are they rooted in the sense of self, they further strengthen and condition the sense of self. So the question and challenge for all of us is understanding how to weaken and ultimately free ourselves from these powerful tendencies of the mind, from the source of difficulty and suffering in our lives.

The general principle—a quite obvious one, given everything we've talked about—was taught by the Buddha to his son, Rāhula. The name of this discourse in the text is "The Buddha's Advice to Rāhula."

The story goes that the Buddha and his son Rāhula were going on alms round in the morning to collect food. As they were walking on alms round, before they got into the village, Rāhula was looking at the physical form of the Buddha—how beautiful it was, a kind of perfection of physical form, physical beauty. In Rāhula's mind, he was starting to delight in the fact that he too resembled his father, seeing the beauty of his father's physical perfection and then reflecting on his resemblance to that.

Does that sound like one of the proliferating tendencies?

Well, the Buddha, being the Buddha, knew what was going on in Rahula's mind. One had to be very careful about one's thoughts in the presence of the Buddha. So the Buddha knew, and he stopped, turned around, and addressed Rahula. This was the background to this particular teaching.

I'm just going to quote a few lines from the actual discourse. "Then the Blessed One, the Buddha, looked back and addressed Rahula thus." Now, Rahula—he's really addressing us. So listen to these words as if we were following the Buddha on alms round, having these thoughts, and the Buddha is turning around and talking to us.

"Any kind of material form should be seen as it actually is, with perfect wisdom. This is not mine. This I am not. This is not myself. Any kind of physical form should be understood with perfect wisdom. This is not mine. This I am not. This is not myself."

Then Rahula asked, "Does this apply only to material form?" And the Buddha elaborated: "No, it includes material form, feeling, perceptions, formations, and consciousness"—which are the five aggregates. That's really the template the Buddha often used. We read it often in the suttas as a way of describing all lived experience. These are the five components, the five building blocks: material elements and form, feeling, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. In other words, everything. This is everything we experience. So the Buddha is saying to apply this teaching to every aspect of what we experience. This is not mine. This I am not. This is not myself.

Clearly this teaching is a corrective to the ways we create and strengthen and manifest the sense of self in our lives. It's directly addressing craving, conceit, and wrong view. We could think of it almost as a kind of mantra of liberation—this mantra reminding us of what frees the mind.

I came across a line by the British poet Philip Larkin which, in some way perhaps unbeknownst to him, really captured the motivation for undertaking this inquiry. I love this line. He said, "I'm tired of going around pretending to be me." I think in a way that captures it. We're all going around pretending to be yourself and pretending to be me. It's tiresome.

So the challenge, of course, is finding different ways of remembering this. We can hear this instruction and this mantra of liberation, but how do we actually put it into practice? How do we do it and see for ourselves the benefit—experiencing the ease and the joy of release from the imprisoning construct of self?

Just to give another little poetic encouragement highlighting this aspect, the kind of ease of it: there's a Polish poet, Anna Swir, and a very short poem called "A Double Rapture." Would you like to have a double rapture? Here it is, a very simple instruction: "Because there is no me, I feel how much there is no me."

That's the double rapture. There's no me in the first place, and because I feel how much there is no me. So again, it just highlights the possibility of really greater freedom, greater ease. We're coming out of, as I said, the imprisonment of a construct.

So it's definitely worth investigating—not just to believe it because someone says it, but to see for ourselves. That's where the transformation takes place. Fortunately, a key to understanding selflessness and to freeing ourselves, at least to some extent, from the grip of papañca—remember, papañca means these proliferating tendencies—is something that is completely obvious but almost always overlooked. And that is by investigating with greater precision and refinement the truth of change.

Just a little anecdote. Someone once asked Suzuki Roshi, who was the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and was a wonderful teacher—

And one of his books was called *Zen Mind Beginner's Mind*, which was really a powerful influence when it came out back in the seventies, perhaps. So someone, one of his students, asked him, "You know, I've been listening to your teachings for so long. I really don't understand it. I don't understand what you've been teaching. Can you express the essence of the Buddhist teaching in a nutshell?" Suzuki Roshi just thought for a moment, and then he said, "Everything changes." Not complicated. Everything changes.

Of course, we all know this intellectually. This is not an esoteric truth, somewhat like selflessness, which is not obvious right away. The truth of change—we all know that things change. But what's so interesting is we know it on one level, yet we don't apply the insight of that seeing or knowing into our unfolding lives. We're not living that insight for the most part. So there's a lot of profundity in those two words: everything changes.

The Buddha often used similes to bring his teachings home, because sometimes a simple image can convey more, and more immediately, than maybe a whole hour's discourse. So I'd like to offer one image, expressed in a very short poem called "Samsara." It's just two lines: "Samsara, castles of sand at water's edge."

Just take a moment to conjure that image in your mind. Sandcastles at water's edge. The fragility and the impermanence of that construction is so clear. A wave comes and washes our precious sandcastle away with all its finely crafted turrets and towers, everything we put so much energy into. Or maybe a heavy rain comes and it's destroyed. Or maybe toward the end of the day, a whole gaggle of kids comes along and just stomps on our sandcastle. It's so clear with that image—castles of sand at water's edge—that the sandcastle has no intrinsic stable existence. The castle is really just a pile of sand. Obviously at water's edge, or really any place else, it's very vulnerable to changing conditions. Hopefully this is not hard to see or to understand. It seems very obvious.

So what does the sandcastle represent? Everything constructed. Everything arising out of conditions. These are the sandcastles of our lives. And what's so profound is that everything constructed, everything arising out of conditions, is everything. Every aspect of life, of the world—our bodies, our minds, the physical world—on every level of magnitude, things are in flux. We could think of galaxies or stars or planets. Civilizations arise and pass away. Individuals with all their various thoughts and feelings are sandcastles. Cells, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles—on every level of existence, this truth of change manifests. Nothing at all is stable and fixed.

When we investigate our own experience of impermanence through mindfulness, with greater and greater refinement, we see that nothing really lasts long enough to constitute a stable self. And we see that for ourselves. At this point, through the greater insight or refinement or perception of change, we are actually entering into the understanding of non-self, of selflessness. We see this in our meditation practice, but also if we're mindful just in our lives throughout the day. Our bodies are always changing. Thoughts come and go. Our emotions are like clouds passing through the mind. Consciousness even is arising and passing away with each new object of attention.

What we really call "self" or "Joseph" is not some substantial, solid, fixed reality, but a kaleidoscope—a kaleidoscopic appearance of changing conditions. We can see this. It's not some deeply hidden truth. We really just need to pay attention to the flow of our experience.

And we also see—and this is important to round out the picture—that all these changing conditions are following natural laws. They're not simply subject to our will and wishes. The body will age and die regardless of what we think about that, because it's just natural law. This is the Dharma. This is the law. This is the nature of things. And the mind, as we know very clearly, seems to have a mind of its own. "Yes, I'm going to sit down and be perfectly concentrated for this hour." Well, it doesn't necessarily follow our wish.

This aspect is another meaning of non-self. In Pali, the word for non-self is *anattā*.

So it's usually translated as non-self, but one of its characteristics, one of its manifestations, is that things are ungovernable—meaning we can't control them simply by our willing or our wishing.

But there's one other aspect that's important to bring into the picture, and that is that this process of change is not happening unlawfully. It's not chaotic, not just this kind of big mix of phenomena that we're swirling around in. No, things are changing, are in this flow, but in a lawful manner. So there is the possibility of directing outcomes if we understand the causes and conditions for something to arise. It's not simply because we wish it. It's because we understand that in this lawful process of change, things arise out of conditions. And if we understand the conditions, then we can help direct or influence the unfolding course of our lives.

And of course, this is the whole basis of dharma practice. As I mentioned yesterday, I think this is the great gift of the Buddha's teachings—because he understood so clearly the causes and conditions behind suffering in our lives, and behind greater freedom and ease in our lives.

So given this deep understanding and experience of continual change—and we need to have the experience, as I said, we already know it intellectually, so that's not the problem—we have to embody it. We have to drop into the actual experience of things changing moment to moment. This is what our meditation is about. This is what mindfulness is about.

As we drop further into this experience of continual change, like the flowing water of the river I mentioned yesterday, and seeing that conditions are not subject to our will, then the Buddha's instruction to Rāhula—and to us—becomes a very direct pointing to the possibility of freedom. He's giving us an instruction here: See everything with perfect wisdom. This, and this includes everything in the mind, in the body, in the world, the cosmos—see everything with perfect wisdom: This is not mine. This is not I. This is not myself.

We can practice this, we can put it into practice, not only in times of formal meditation but also in the daily activities of our lives—and not stay satisfied or just follow along in our conventional way of understanding things, our superficial way of understanding things. We can practice disentangling from the papañca of craving, conceit, and wrong view. This can actually be practiced.

Of course, the very big question remains: Okay, how do I practice? What do I actually do?

Going back to the discourse of the Buddha instructing Rāhula, there's a nice little human touch here. It says that even though Rāhula was following the Buddha into the village for alms round, he had the thought—after being instructed and exhorted by the Buddha—that he would not simply go on into the village for food. And so he turned around, all inspired to put the teaching into practice, sat down at the root of a tree, and meditated for the day.

Happily for us, there are some simple ways of exploring this quite profound teaching even when we're eating. We don't necessarily have to turn back and find the root of a tree. Even in the act of eating, if we are paying attention in a certain way, we can be exploring this instruction.

One practice I've found particularly helpful, whether in eating or in anything else—this is a practice that

can be applied at any time—is holding a question in mind, holding it from moment to moment: What is being known? Just moment to moment, in whatever we're doing, but we could say in this case, eating. We're engaged in eating, and we hold that question: moment after moment, what is actually being known?

With eating, for example, the conventional answer if somebody asked, "Well, what are you doing?" would be, "I'm eating." That would be the conventional response. But right there, in that response, already there's an I. "I'm eating," and then it becomes "my food." It's so interesting—all of that is just strengthening, unknowingly, that conventional way of responding and perceiving. Unknowingly, we're strengthening the sense of I, strengthening the sense of self.

Just for a moment, reflect on how pervasive these proliferating tendencies are. They impact almost everything we do. We're continually reinforcing the sense of I, the belief in a self doing it all.

But with strong mindfulness and investigation and interest—interest is a key component here—and with the question "What is actually being known?"—a simple question—we see that experiences are arising and passing away moment after moment. What we call eating, what we give that general name or "I'm eating," is really sequential moments of the sensations of chewing, of tasting, of swallowing.

Perhaps interspersed with moments of sounds being known or thoughts being known.

So this is what's happening. It's like moment after moment, just these different momentary experiences arising and passing, arising and passing. And we see the changing nature so clearly. It's so obvious when the mind settles back into each of these experiences, just with bare attention. What is being known? Chewing. Tasting. Maybe seeing. Hearing. Thinking. Just moment after moment, we're tracking it.

But when we're settled back in that way, there's no forward leaning into the next moment. And in that, we're no longer craving for the next taste. Have you noticed how often—many people, we can be eating and chewing food, and even when there's still food in our mouth, we're reaching for more? So what's that about? It's just the mind of craving. We've chewed out the taste, and there's that craving for another taste, even as we still have food in our mouth. This is just the normal habit for very many people.

This practice of settling back—okay, what's being known?—then we really are settled back into the moment. And so there is no proliferation of mind, no reaching out, no leaning forward. There's no sense of "I am the one eating." It's just a sound being known or a taste being known. So we've freed ourselves, at least for those moments. We've freed the mind from craving, from conceit. There's no sense of a self doing anything. There's just that experience being known. There's no agitation, there's no perturbation of mind.

I hope you see this is not complicated. The real challenge is not in doing it. It's remembering to do it. We just get so caught up in the busyness of our lives that we forget that the Dharma can be lived, can be applied, whatever we're doing. We don't want to miss those opportunities.

Here I want to emphasize the importance of language and how language can deeply condition our

understanding, often without our realizing it. Yesterday I mentioned how we misunderstand the meaning of self, ascribing to it some substantial fixed reality when really it's only a word designating a process. How we understand the use of language really changes how we perceive things.

In this instance, in this exercise of holding the question of what is being known moment after moment, it changes our usual linguistic framework from the active voice to the passive voice. In the active voice, there's a subject, a verb, an object, and so we would say, "I'm eating food," or "I'm going here or there," or "I'm hearing a sound." But this use of language, the active voice, as you can see, already posits the I—just in our normal way of conversation. I'm doing this, I'm doing that.

I'm often remembering Descartes' famous dictum: "I think, therefore I am," as if somehow that proved the existence of an I. But already "I think" posits the I. So it's really saying "I, therefore I." Instead of eliminating the I: thinking, therefore thinking.

The passive voice takes the subject out of it. Even though writing coaches will say, "Try to avoid the passive voice, it's not an energized way of writing," for the purpose of meditative insight, I have found this tremendously useful. I've used this a lot in my practice. It reveals so much and actually makes the practice much easier, because it's not an I trying to do something.

So instead of "I'm knowing the taste," it's "a taste being known." And that phrase, "a taste being known," there's no subject. It just describes the actual experience of what's happening. This application of this linguistic tool can be very helpful, and I've used it a lot.

Just do the same experiment we did yesterday, moving the arm, but here with a different purpose. Yesterday I was talking about how we can use it to be mindfulness that's feeling it rather than watching it—that use of language. But here we can just move the arm and it's just the movement being known. Not "I'm knowing the movement." Just moving the arm.

So as you do that—and I hope you are; I can't see you, but I hope you're following instructions—you're just moving your arm and really getting to the experience of moving it. It's just the movement being known. Does it take any effort at all? The knowing is happening simultaneously as we're paying attention.

This way of understanding, this way of framing experience, not only takes the subject out of it, not only takes the I out of it, it also takes unnecessary efforting out of it. Things become so useful. Okay, this is a whole long pitch for using this.

What's being known moment after moment—this reveals very clearly, very simply, very immediately the truth of change. Experiences are just changing moment after moment through the successive moments. When we are not seeing this and we're back more in that active conventional mode of "I'm eating," it would be easy to come to the conclusion that there's some more or less permanent I who's doing all of this. It's in that way that we get ensconced in wrong view.

There's a lot of power in this way of seeing impermanence through the passive voice, because not only are we seeing the change, but the way we're framing it already takes the subject out of it. So it's very liberating.

What I would suggest, if you're inspired to explore this further, is just to take five or ten minutes at a time. You don't have to think, "Oh, I have to be doing this all day long"—which, if you could, would be fine—but just start small. Just five minutes where your intention, whether it's eating or doing anything else... You could be going for a walk and just asking, okay, moment after moment, what's being known? It might be a movement. It might be the feeling of the breeze on your face. It might be the feeling of the sun, or a thought, or a sound. You'll have the same experience of the flow of phenomena, the momentary change that's going on.

There's one other very direct, immediate, and in a way quite startling practice for seeing with tremendous immediacy the profundity of change. And that is seeing how things are continually falling away. It's almost like being at the edge of a waterfall, and the water just keeps falling over the edge.

One time I was just going for a walk around here in Barre, trying to be mindful. And then I started reflecting: well, what happened to the experience of the step a minute ago? And I realized it's gone. Completely gone. It's past. And then: what about a step thirty seconds ago? Gone, completely gone. And so I brought it right up to the present moment stepping, and could see that every moment things are falling away. Every moment it's water over the waterfall.

It's not difficult to do this. It's just tuning the mind into it, because this is what's happening. You might try it. It might be easy if you go through the process that I did—start with a minute ago or five minutes ago, because it's so obvious that it's gone—and then work your way up to just this very last moment.

Gone, gone, gone, gone, gone.

So we have the very embodied experience of this continual change, this continual falling away. Now in that space, in that experience, it's really quite profound because first we see the impossibility of clinging—things are just falling away moment after moment. So the clinging falls away. The "I" falls away. It's almost like everything falls away. And so we really begin to experience the mind that's free of these papañca, free of clinging, free of grasping. We get a taste of a possibility of the mind that is not holding on to anything.

You see, in both of these exercises, they're not difficult to do. One doesn't have to have been practicing for thirty years in order to do this. They're simple exercises, ones that I've just played with and explored in my own practice. Coming out of retreat, they're very alive for me, and that's why I wanted to share them.

Another approach that I played with on retreat, which was equally revealing and quite interesting to me, also had to do with exploring "not mine, not I, not myself." This was using the framework of the physical elements—not in an ongoing systematic way, because the practice on the elements is its own meditative

technique, and there are ways of developing it very consistently over time. But I was using it just enough to reveal the important role, again, of language in how we experience things.

Let me explain this a little more. Just as a reminder, in the classical texts the Buddha used a kind of shorthand, common in those times, to describe the physical elements in terms of the felt experience of them. So here, when we talk of the physical elements, we're not talking about the periodic table of elements that we learn in chemistry—that's something different. We're using this very classical formulation of the physical elements that was common at that time: the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The Buddha used that as shorthand for describing how we actually experience them.

So for example, earth is hardness. The earth element is the experience of hardness. Fire element is the experience of warmth or coldness—its absence. Air element is movement and pressure. Water element represents cohesion, which holds everything together.

I was doing walking meditation, and what I've noticed for a long time now—even before applying this teaching on the elements—is that even when we're being mindful in walking, really being pretty mindful and feeling the sensations of the movement and touch, there's often a subtle, almost subliminal background impression of "I'm walking." It's not something that's actively formulated in the mind, but without much reflection, if somebody asked me what I'm doing, I'd say, "I'm walking." So that conditioning is just so strong within us, and we carry it throughout the day.

Not only is there that very subtle background impression of "I'm walking," but I also notice that there's often, even as we're being mindful of the different sensations, a very minimal overlay of an image of the foot or leg. We're walking and we're feeling the movement, but it's almost as if the movement is contained within this almost invisible image—but it's there in the mind. Foot. Leg.

So for a short period of time, I started walking but noting the movement and the touch of each step using the framework of the elements. As I felt the forward movement, I would note it as "air" or "air element." And as I experienced the touch, the hardness as I touched the ground, I noted it as "earth" or "earth element." But I was also connecting that note—air element, earth element—to the felt experience of it, so it wasn't just this concept in my mind. It was connecting that language to the experience.

All this seems quite simple. It was really just a change of language. But again, I want to emphasize that it needed to connect the words to the experience. There was a striking shift just from this simple exercise. Because when I noted "air" or I noted "earth," connected to the experience of the movement and touch, the conceptual overlay of foot and leg completely disappeared. It was just air element, earth element.

And it was so clear that air element, earth element doesn't belong to me. Would you ever say—unlike "my leg"—would you ever say "my earth element" or "my air"? No. When we drop down to that level, that particular proliferating tendency falls away.

It was so clear. It's just the movement, or air element. Earth element. So the concept of leg fell away, it

clearly wasn't mine, and there clearly wasn't any "I am" in it. Again, would you ever say "I am the earth element" or "I am..."? No. Because we've dropped down to a different level of understanding, a different level of perception, where we're seeing things really as they are—free of the proliferating tendencies which then condition our perception of things and condition the reinforcing of the view of self.

So I hope you're getting some idea. There are practices that we do that are not complicated. Any of us can do them if we have the interest. And there's an immediacy to the effect.

So we get a real, genuine, deep insight into both the truth of impermanence and the truth of the non-personal nature of experience. Air element, earth element—these are non-personal. This is just nature. This is just nature manifesting its nature.

I'd really encourage you, again, if you have the interest, to explore this for yourself, because I found it very, very revealing. And even since I've been out of retreat now for a week or so and getting very busy again and involved in the world, quite amazingly, now even when I go for a walk, having practiced this on retreat, I find my mind just slipping right into that way of experiencing each step.

One of the benefits of this—and it's a big benefit—is that in times of mental distress or mental suffering, which almost always revolve around one papañca or other... You know, when we're really caught up in suffering or distress, very likely there's a mind with "I am" or "this is self" involved in that. So in times of some kind of mental unease, to drop into this level of perception—oh, air element, earth element—where those proliferating tendencies fall away, it takes us right out of the distress, right out of the suffering.

I hope you're as interested in this as I am, because it just seems so compelling. It has to do with how suffering is created in our lives and how to be free. Often when the Buddha was asked, "What do you teach?" he would say he teaches just one thing: suffering and its end. And often we think, "Oh, yes, well, I'll practice for a hundred lifetimes and maybe I'll get enlightened by the end of it and come to the end of suffering." Well, that may be the case, but we can actually come to the end of suffering, even if it's for a few minutes at a time, when we apply the teachings. We don't want to postpone it. We want to actually use this as a very effective tool for well-being in our lives.

And perhaps if your interest is not quite piqued enough yet, maybe this one last piece will be that final boost to inspire you. This teaching on the elements is exactly the teaching that the Buddha gave to Rāhula. He went on, after saying that everything should be seen with perfect wisdom as "this is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself," to say that you should see form in this way. You should see all of the aggregates in this way. And then, describing this exercise on the elements, he said—Rāhula, this is right from the discourse—"Now both the internal and external earth element is simply earth element. And it should be seen as it actually is with perfect wisdom: this is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself." And then the same with all the other elements.

So the Buddha was using this practice of working with the elements to cut through the conceit of "I am"

that was in Rāhula's mind. If the Buddha were giving us that instruction, wouldn't you be inspired to go out and practice it? Even if we don't turn back from getting our breakfast, we can actually apply it as we're eating breakfast.

I would really like to encourage you to play with all of these various suggestions: things being known, using that passive voice of knowing; seeing the impermanence of things falling away; bringing that awareness right into this very last moment—falling away, falling away, falling away—and just see what that feels like. See what you learn from that. Or use this exercise on the elements.

As we practice this more and more and learn to touch the experience, at least at times, this experience of non-self, of selflessness—that this whole mind-body process is that flow of changing experiences—we can do this even as we're engaged in the normal activities of our lives, as well as in formal practice. We see that the natural expression of not-mine-ness, "this is not mine," results very often in spontaneous expressions of generosity. When we're not holding on to things being mine, generosity can flow much more easily. And in being generous, we are also weakening the sense of self. We're letting go. We're reinforcing that sense of not-mine-ness.

I had a very clear experience of this, which I've mentioned in various dharma talks over the years, but it was a very vivid experience. When I came back from India for the last time—this was in 1974—that summer I was teaching at the first summer session of Naropa Institute, the Buddhist college that Trungpa Rinpoche set up in Boulder, Colorado. I was teaching a course in vipassanā, and they had given me a faculty apartment to live in.

It turns out that of all my friends who had been in India together, I was the first one back and the first one who had a job of any kind, and therefore the only one with an apartment. So as my friends came back from India during that summer, the question was, "Where should we go? Let's go visit—we'll stay with Joseph in Boulder." These were very close friends from India. But I can't remember now exactly how many—it was more than two, perhaps four or five, maybe six friends showed up at my apartment in Boulder, and I was working pretty hard.

I was teaching many sessions a day and could feel myself getting a little tight. This was just a one-bedroom apartment, and all these friends were piled in sleeping bags on the floor. I could feel myself getting contracted by this.

But then I had what was like a mini satori. At a certain point, very fortunately for me, I began to question: well, why am I so upset? Because in India, when we were there together, we shared much more crowded circumstances and there was no problem.

I realized that all the distress, all the suffering was coming about because I was thinking of it as *my* apartment. It was that simple. This apartment is mine, and these people are invading it. So naturally I resisted, I didn't like this—even though they were close friends. As soon as I let go of that idea, "this is

mine," it just became a shared space, as we had done so many times in India. There was no problem at all. In fact, I then got to enjoy the presence and company of these dear friends.

So it has very practical applications for how we relate to our circumstances in the world. It might be interesting, whenever we feel contracted in one way or another, to investigate. This feeling of "this is mine" is not necessarily the only cause of that contraction, but it could be a not uncommon cause. It might be worth looking in those times when we feel contracted: Am I holding onto something as being mine? Is there a possibility, and is it appropriate, to let go of that idea? To simply say, okay, this is not mine—this is just the space we're all sharing.

I want to emphasize, though, in suggesting this, it's not to put it out as an absolute, because there could well be times when it's totally appropriate to set boundaries and to say, "No, this is not right." We have to look with clarity at the situation and apply the appropriate remedy. But this could be one avenue that we perhaps don't think of very often—to see in a particular situation whether this would be appropriate and whether it would actually ease our suffering.

We can also see how our deepening understanding of non-self, by cutting through the proliferating tendencies of craving, conceit, and wrong view, expresses itself in the lived experiences of the four brahma viharas. As most of you probably know, these are those qualities of mind: loving-kindness or metta, compassion, empathetic joy where we take happiness in the happiness of others, and equanimity.

When I think of the Buddha and the liberated mind, what I imagine is this great expanse of awareness, free of any contraction of self, and also suffused with these four qualities. It's a beautiful expression of what's possible for us as human beings—where we're not constricted in this prison of self and it manifests through these beautiful qualities.

I wanted to give just a few examples of how each of these qualities comes about through the letting go of papañca. As we let go of craving, conceit, and wrong view, they express themselves in these very beautiful ways. There could be many examples for each of them, but I'll share ones that came to mind.

There's one discourse where one of the great disciples of the Buddha, named Anuruddha, was in a park or forest grove with two other monks practicing. The Buddha came by to meet with them, and I'll read just a little piece of the discourse.

The Buddha is speaking: "I hope, Anuruddha, that you are all living in concord with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes."

Anuruddha replied, "Surely we are living in concord in just this way."

The Buddha said, "But Anuruddha, how do you live thus?"

"Venerable sir, as to that, I maintain bodily acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones, both openly and privately. I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness, mental acts of loving-kindness, both

openly and privately." And here's the sentence that really jumped out at me: "I consider, why should I not set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do? That is how we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes."

When we are not in the grip of "this is mine," "this I am," "this is myself," then it's easy to have that thought: Why should I not set aside what I want to do and do what these others would like to do? Because we're not holding on. We're not holding on to the notion, "Oh, I need this."

Again, we need to see when this is appropriate, because there might be situations where, for whatever reason, we should be doing what we wish to do. I'm not making this into an absolute dictum. But I've found in my own life that this understanding can come into play a lot. I try to live like this when I'm with friends and people—where should we go to dinner? Where would you like to go?

I'm happy to go wherever you'd like to go. It's not a big thing. But as we let this settle into the way we live, this is an expression of loving-kindness, of mettā. And it comes about when we've loosened the grip of "I" and "me" and "mine." Our lives just become an expression of generosity and loving-kindness.

Now let's consider compassion. There are two examples I want to give of how loosening the papañca opens us to compassion.

One experience happened when I was still practicing in India, in Bodh Gaya. For those of you who have been in India, you will probably recognize this—generally the situation of dogs in India is terrible. Often there are just wild dogs, not aggressively wild, but they're not people's pets. There are many, many just wandering around the village, and they're really in pitiable condition, often with mange, starving. It's hard.

Sometimes I'd be in the village at one of the tea shops, the chai shops, just having a cup of tea and maybe some sweets. And these dogs would come up. I noticed two very different reactions in my mind. When I was caught in "Oh, I just want to enjoy my cup of tea and have these sweets"—then I had no patience. I didn't even want to see. It was too disturbing to see, and it was disturbing the enjoyment of my tea.

But at other times, when my heart was a little more open and relaxed and I wasn't in the grip of the papañca, then I actually let the suffering of those dogs in. Instead of trying to keep it out, I would just sit there having my tea, but I really opened to the experience of those poor dogs. Instead of resistance or avoidance, all that arose was compassion. The suffering was so obvious. And as the compassion came up, I'd respond very differently—throw them a little food, whatever.

Where does that difference of response come from? From whether the papañca were there or not there. Do you see that? These brahmavihāras, these beautiful qualities of mind, come about quite naturally when we can step out of the constricting nature of "I," "me," "mine." We want to see that and really see it in our own lives.

So how does muditā—sympathetic joy—come about? This is one of my favorite examples because I think it's pretty unusual. This is a little story about the French essayist Montaigne. He lived back a few hundred years—the 1500s, 1600s, something like that. He had this profoundly important friendship with someone, a platonic relationship, but of profound importance in his life.

This is what he wrote about his way of relating in this relationship. I find it quite striking. From Montaigne:

"In a truly loving relationship, which I have experienced, rather than drawing the one I love to me, I give myself to him. Not merely do I prefer to do him good rather than to have him do good to me, I would even prefer that he did good to himself rather than to me. It is when he does good to himself that he does most good to me. If his absence is either pleasant or useful to him, then it delights me far more than his presence."

Isn't that pretty amazing in terms of relationships? This is genuine muditā—taking joy, taking delight in the happiness of others. I don't know how common this is in people's normal relationships. "I would even prefer that he did good to himself rather than to me. It is when he does good to himself that he does most good to me. If his absence is either pleasant or useful to him, then it delights me far more than his presence."

I find that tremendously insightful and beautiful. That would be a beautiful way to be in relationship to people.

Because again, we're taking the I, me, mine out of it. And it just opens up the possibility of these wonderfully beautiful qualities of heart and mind.

So the last of them is equanimity. This is expressed so clearly in one very pithy teaching of the Buddha—the possibility of profound equanimity that points directly to liberation. And we can begin to experience it, again, even just for a few moments at a time.

The Buddha said: when seeing impermanence—which I talked a lot about how we might do—in seeing impermanence, and we can see this for ourselves, the mind doesn't cling. Things are continually passing away. When not clinging, it is not agitated.

We should check that out for ourselves. When we're in that flow of impermanence, see if there's clinging or not. Don't just believe it, but I think you'll see that there is no clinging because things are continually changing. And when not clinging, see whether there's agitation in the mind or not. We put it to the test. When not clinging, it is not agitated. When the mind doesn't cling, it is not agitated. When not agitated, it personally realizes Nibbana, the highest peace.

Again, as we let go of the proliferating tendencies, as we cut through them, we really can taste a very profound peace.

I'd like to close with the last words of the Buddha. Just imagine the scene. The Buddha spent forty-five years teaching tremendously devoted disciples, many of whom had realized enlightenment or stages of enlightenment, or were on the path to stages of awakening. You can just imagine the moment—the Buddha is dying, these are his very last words. You can imagine the import they had. We should hear them in that way, really as if these are the Buddha's last words to us:

With the light of perfect wisdom, dispel the darkness of ignorance. Subject to decay are all conditioned things. Practice with heedfulness. Subject to decay are all conditioned things—sand castles at water's edge. Subject to decay are all conditioned things. Practice with diligence.

For all of us, we need to find ways in the very midst of our lives—in all the busyness of it, in the midst of all our worldly activities—to remember and put these teachings into practice. These are the practices that free the heart.

I find it inspiring to reflect on the fact that people have been practicing these teachings for thousands of years, realizing the benefit from their practice. Now it's up to us. It's like now it's our turn to put these teachings into practice and to carry the teachings forward.

So thank you. Let's just sit for a moment and let the words dissolve.

May all beings be at peace.

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