

8 July 2010 Dharma Talk: Right Understanding

So how many of you were here for the video last time? For those of you who didn't see the video, this is a video that I just produced – a basic tutorial on meditation and the meditative mind. It goes into the theory of attention and how attention is the key to liberation, to awakening. What we pay attention to and how we pay attention. I also prepared a video on the Power of Intention, which is my answer to “The Secret,” that movie which some of you may have seen –

Who told me the joke? The joke about the sweet potato, “I Yam. I am a sweet potato therefore I Yam.” I got a couple more for you. You know how in Star Wars they call Chi or Chi energy the Force? And that Chi energy is essentially our wave nature in quantum physics. All objects have both the particle nature and the wave nature. Wave nature is what the Buddhists call emptiness, or pure energy – conscious, loving, energy that is the source of the universe. So in Star Wars they call that The Force.

That's a long setup for a very silly joke, but in my video I talk about Rene Descartes' famous saying, “I think, therefore I am,” is really flawed because it implies that it is our thoughts is what creates us. And that is what is getting all of us and the whole world into trouble. Because it allows thought to become our masters instead of our servants. And they are very bad masters at that, because they keep us in the sense of separation.

I was thinking that when you allow thoughts to dominate your consciousness and keep you from realizing who and what you truly are... that what you are doing is putting Descartes before The Force. Hahahaha!

Here's another one, probably going to be just as bad. Those who saw my video the other day know that I address that advice that is given by so many motivation and self-improvement experts.. the idea to think outside the box. I mentioned that that advice is really misguided because thinking is the box. Thinking is the box. We have to get out of the trap that thinking has become for us. We don't want to think outside the box, we just want to get outside thinking.

It reminded me of the story of Pandora. Everybody remembers the story of Pandora in Greek mythology? She was doing fine until somebody told her to think outside the box.

There's another one. Those of you who are new are not aware that what we have here during these Dharma Talks is what I call Zen sitdown comedy, as opposed to stand-up comedy.

What I am going to do is another “Hello Dalai” as in Dalai Lama talk. I have taken some of the pages from my Dalai Lama daily calendar which has daily quotes from the Dalai Lama and I'll read some of those quotes and make my comments and then ask for your comments or questions. As I read these there are many of them that I agree with totally, but then there are some that I sometimes take exception to.

So here's the first one this was from Wednesday, March 31 and the Dalai Lama says, “In the work environment if there is a lot of injustice and exploitation, try to change this environment rather than accept it.”

In the work environment if there is a lot of injustice and exploitation, then to passively tolerate it is the wrong response. The appropriate response really is to actively resist it, to try to change this environment rather than accept it.

To me it seems to contradict what the Dalai Lama is doing with his major situation. Now I find it rather curious for the Dalai Lama to say because here we have someone who was expelled from his own country by an aggressive nation, basically living in exile and his response up to now has always been to accept the situation and to forgive the Chinese for doing what they did and what they continue to do to his people. So his attitude towards his own country is one of nonresistance and yet here he saying that in your workplace for example that you should actively resist it.

We know from our study of Buddhism and from our study of psychology the idea that what you resist

persists. Whatever you see in your environment that you don't like is a projection of some shadow element of your personality. So when we resist it what we are actually doing is resisting ourselves

We are resisting and we are abdicating our ability and our power to change that dynamic in ourselves. so that we never have to project it into our environment any more. We don't have to experience any more. That to a Buddhist I think would be the proper attitude to take. That's my take on the saying. I guess I disagree with the Dalai Lama.

C: I think you should resist.

C: I would agree with you but I haven't reached this level yet. I would resist I think.

That's fine. But what kind of resistance are we talking about here?

C: Be the peace that you seek.

Yes, that is absolutely true. And that's what Ghandi was: a champion of nonviolent resistance, so he didn't resist his oppressors in his heart. He cleared his heart of any hatred or any anger or any resentment but then he disobeyed whatever it was that they were doing.

C: I would forgive the oppressors, but I would resist.

Okay. The important point I think is here is to understand that whatever we experience in our lives is a direct reflection of the issues and dynamics that we are harboring and holding and allowing to play out within ourselves. To the extent that we experience suffering, to the extent that we experience distress, to the extent that we experience unpleasant things happening -- that's a mirror for us and it's a mirror that we can use to help us to gauge where we are in our own quest for inner peace, enlightenment, awakening whatever you want to call it.

We do that first so that any action that we take comes from a source of peace rather than a source of hostility and anger and fear. Because whatever action we take that is based in hostility or anger or fear is going to recoil upon us and it's going to create more conflict. But if we act with peace in our hearts then yes we can resist. You know when Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek," he didn't mean let people slap you around and beat you up. He meant to not resist or hate these people who were doing these things, because they are simply reflections of the hatred or the hostility that you have within you. Otherwise you never would have called them to you, never would be experiencing them.

So our task as spiritual seekers or spiritual practitioners is to purge ourselves, to release the hatred in our heart. And then yes we can resist or disobey or do whatever it is that needs to be done to change the external situation. That is the true matrix from which positive change arises. Not from the conflict of politics, not from the conflict the war, not from the conflict of differing economic systems but from the releasing of the hatred and resentment that we hold in our hearts; that will then, through forgiveness, bless those who are seeming to oppress us and allow them to open their hearts as well. That's the only way our world is going to be transformed to the Utopia, if that is the appropriate term. To that state that all of us would love to see descend upon this planet.

How many people do you know that when you ask them, "What is it that you want? What do you want most in life?" answer, "What I really want is world peace." These are the unselfish ones among us who really want world peace. Well, if you really want world peace be peace, and then that peaceful vibration go out to everyone you meet and actually on the quantum level to everyone in the entire universe, all sentient beings. That's how we will transform this world.

C: Baby steps

Yes, baby steps. Baby steps have to occur within us. Remember in past Dharma Talks you were taling about how do you let go of that coal, that hot coal of negative emotions were experiencing inside, so that we can purge ourselves and we can release these negative shadow issues that we have. And that's what it takes. It takes baby steps. It takes being aware moment to moment of what we're feeling and what we're thinking at the time and are we putting out positive vibrations, putting a peaceful vibrations

or are we putting out vibrations of hostility and fear? Making the choice in every moment because enlightenment is simply making an enlightened choice in every moment. Moment to moment to moment.

You know you've heard the four noble truths of the Buddha in his first sermon. The first is: life is suffering. The second is: suffering is caused by separation and attachment and desire. The third is: suffering can be transcended. And what was the fourth?

C: The eight-fold path.

Exactly. And what is the first step in the eight-fold path? Right thinking, or as I like to put right understanding.

C: Right view.

Exactly. Right view, right thinking, right understanding. And what is that understanding? What is that right view? Because there are only two viewpoints that we can hold, and right now most of us hold the wrong one. What is the right one?

C: That there is no separation.

Exactly. That's the right one. The wrong one is that we live in a world of separation -- that we are separate from our source, that we are a separate entity in a universe of other separate entities, and that we need to act on all of these other entities in order to survive and get our needs met. That's wrong understanding. All of our negative emotions, all of our negative reactions to situations that we confront in our daily life are based in this wrong understanding. Our task on the spiritual path is to adopt right understanding. And then all of our actions, all of our thinking, all of our feelings flow from that right understanding.

Because if you truly adopt right understanding, then the other seven parts of the eightfold path, You don't even need to worry about them, you don't even need to think about them. Right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood they all fall into place if you come from space of right understanding, right view, right thinking.

Right understanding is something that we need to keep with us. Even though there is only now, we experience one now after another after another after another. So it's paradoxical. We can only experience now. Our minds, our thoughts can create the past and future and string them together. But right understanding is something that we have to adopt and live in every moment like that scene in the Indiana Jones of the holy Grail where he has to choose which Grail? And the knight templar says, "You can choose foolishly, or you can choose wisely." We need to choose wisely. That is, to think and act from right understanding in every moment with whatever we're experiencing.

Q: How to put it into practice, and how difficult it is.

13:45

Yes it is difficult. It takes a lot of awareness. It takes a lot of attention. It takes a lot of vigilance. Those of you who are Americans in the sense of lived here in United States are familiar with our third President Thomas Jefferson. In one of his famous statements or proverbs was, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

He was talking about political liberty at the time. But that phrase can also be applied to spiritual liberation. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberation. Always has been, always will be. We need to be aware in every moment of whether or not you are acting, whether you are feeling, whether you are thinking from space a great understanding or from wrong understanding... from that view of separation. And let your actions flow from that right understanding. Then you'll never make a mistake, will never get into trouble, you'll never be harmed.

C: It's not an easy task.

Absolutely right. If you saw the video one of the slides mentioned that meditation or mindfulness or enlightenment is simple, but not easy. So viewing things from right understanding of moment to moment basis is very simple. Look at it. There's only two things to ways we can choose. It's not like we have a million different ways we have to choose from and we get confused. There's only two ways. We either see things from the point of view separation, and lack, and disconnection, or we see things from the point of unity and integrity. And whenever we adopt that integrity, whenever we act from that integrity, we will never get in trouble. We will always create the situation that we want and that will serve our highest good and purpose and the highest good and purpose of everyone around us and all sentient beings and all of creation. And it boils down to that integrity.

So it's very simple. The choice is very simple. But it's not always easy to accomplish. Because we get lost in our thoughts.

C: Being beautifies. Having separates.

And that is true. Being.. as a verb, not as a noun, but as a verb. Be-ing. Being is what we are. Lao Tsu said "The way to do is to be." When you're in touch, when you have right understanding you are in touch with the core of your being so everything follows. Perfectly.

C: Putting it into practice, that's where the challenge comes in.

Q: Would you say that our experience is of being rather than of having?

Yes. If you live are living in your integrity. if you're living in your being then you can have anything that you want. It doesn't really matter. And you can do anything that you want. It doesn't really matter. You already understand that you have everything anyway. Because you are everything. But if you're coming from wrong understanding, then you always feel that you need to get things, and have things and posses things, or do things that are going to fill that empty hole that you have inside of you. That hole is created by adopting wrong understanding, by adopting that viewpoint of separation.

So eternal vigilance is doing this on a moment to moment basis. And being present, becoming, as we did in our ABC exercise. Becoming the breath, becoming the body, becoming. Allowing the sense of boundary between inside and outside to dissolve and to disappear. And to feel, not just to think, but to feel in the core of our being that we are in perfect and total connection with the energy of the entire universe. Physical and non-physical. That we're like ice cubes floating in the ocean. We're the same water as the ocean just a little bit more dense. But we are still connected with the entire ocean.

I'm flipping through these pages from the calendar and I have one here from the Dalai Lama again that perfectly epitomizes exactly what we were talking about. And the Dalai Lama says, "Free of hatred or anger we can respond to actions committed against us far more effectively if we approach things with a cool head." And by that I would interpret as right understanding. "We see the problem more clearly and judge the best way to address it." Perfect. What more can you say than that?

Here's another one that extols the virtue of spiritual practice.

C: I think it is related to the oppressor thing. You don't hate them, just resist them without hate.

Yes, that's exactly it. And how do you drop the hatred? You drop the hatred by just looking at it but not reacting to it and not expressing it. I spoke about this two or three dharma talks ago when I mentioned that the martial art that I practice, aikido is a perfect analogy for this kind of response. Because aikido is the art of non-resistance. If somebody throws a punch at us we don't block it and then hit them back. We move out of the way. But we move to a place that is the center of the energy that's being thrown at us. And and then from that centerpoint we can effortlessly redirect it. Redirect that energy. And the person who actually threw the punch winds up flying through the air and having happen to him exactly what he intended was supposed to happen to you. So I like to call aikido instant Karma for that reason. And it is responding to an attack in a way that simply reflects back to the aggressor the energy that he's putting out. Without accepting it. By becoming a mirror.

So here's the next quote from the Dalai Lama: "Your memory will improve if you are able to practice a little meditation every day withdrawing from the scattered mind." Well, that's exactly what I was saying in my video. I continue now from the Dalai Lama: "The conceptual mind that runs on thinking of good things bad things and so forth will get a rest." In other words you get out of the box that thinking has become. "A little non-conceptuality will provide a much-needed vacation."

20:29

Well, thank you Dalai, but it can provide even more than that. It can provide you liberation which is even better than a vacation. Because for a vacation you've got to go somewhere. When you're when liberated, when you're awake, you're on vacation without ever having to leave home. You're free – right in the midst of your ordinary daily activities.

Here's another quote that addresses the statement that was made before about how it's difficult sometimes to always choose to see with right understanding and then to act from that choice. So the Dalai Lama says, "Whatever forms of meditation you practice the most important thing is apply mindfulness continuously and make a sustained effort, it is unrealistic to expect results for meditation within a short period of time. What is required is a continuous, sustained effort. Consistency."

So like I said before is very simple. Very, very, very simple. But it's not always easy because we have these resistances in our shadow. We have these issues that come from a time when we originally adopted wrong understanding. We adopted this sense of separation and then built upon it with all sorts of supportive attitudes, and thoughts, and concepts and behavior patterns that attempt to ratify it. All of our need for acquisition, our need for revenge our need for control – all of it comes from this wrong understanding that we adopted when we were infants, and that we have built on ever since.

It's like trying to build a skyscraper on a foundation of sand. We need to topple that skyscraper and start from the beginning again on the rock solid foundation of, paradoxically, emptiness; of connection, of oneness, of right understanding. Then we truly will fulfill Lao Tzu's proverb and all of our doing will come out of our being.

So to go back to the idea of the noble eight fold path, we have a modern version of the eightfold path and that is called the Integrative Transformational Pathways. These are practices that address the four major dimensions or modalities of human consciousness and existence: body, mind spirit, and shadow. We have practices and tools that address each of them so that it will make this journey (what seems to be journey, because is not really journey because we are only coming home to ourselves – who we really are right here and now) it's like lifting a veil rather than traveling somewhere. They're the tools that we could use that will help us to let go of the veils that we're holding in place that keep us from seeing who we are.

I thank you all. I wish you love peace and great joy and thank you again for sharing this time,

Namaste

Jim Giorgi