

10_1_25 Talk*

*This is an automatically generated transcript, so there are errors.

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] I'm really struck by one version of what I'm interested in talking about. Comes from the comment from Joyce. She says essentially, could you talk more about how to cope during these turbulent times? My fear and despair are escalating. So I've been reflecting a lot. About what is truly reliable. If you know maybe even a little bit about the Buddha's own journey, a real person did not claim any divine guidance or supernatural powers. Ordinary person with an ordinary. Fundamental sense, ordinary. Whose path was really a quest for finding truly reliable basis for the highest happiness. What is reliable in a context of impermanence and compoundedness and interdependence in which everything is processes in relationships? It's all just swirling around. As Alan Watts put it, life is wiggly. People change, conditions change, times change. What's truly reliable? How do we find what's truly reliable for ourselves? A turbulent and often disappointing world.

[00:01:43] So I'd like to explore that with you as an inquiry into what you yourself find reliable. And before we go into it, I'd to address something that routinely comes up around this kind of exploration, which is yes, but. Yes, but, if I focus on what's reliable, I will stop being aware of what is changing or unsettled or the thin ice I'm walking on. And that's when I crashed through. That's an understandable yes, but. A version of that is quite embodied in which people get anxious about not feeling anxious. Because that's one in their history, either experienced or observed. Bad things happened. So I want to address that up front that we can bring our awareness to the refuges or the secure basis or the underlying grounds that are indeed reliable. Maybe not absolutely reliable in a cosmic sense, but certainly reasonably reliable in this world of wonders. We can be aware of those things while also being vigilant. Could let us down. Keeping our eyes open as we walk on shaky ground and actually realizing that staying in touch with what's truly reliable as you decide for you, what is truly reliable, can actually help us deal better with unreliable people and conditions.

[00:03:35] So let's open this up. And I'll propose a handful of, I'll call them things that I consider to be. Reliable. The first is the present. It's always now. And as you may have experienced in the meditation, when we come into the present, there's a simplicity in it. In the simplicity of the present the moment is passing away as the next moment arises endlessly. Is always available to us. And you might notice that when you bring awareness into the present, a lot of suffering decreases because so much of our suffering is based on what scientists call mental time travel in which drawing on the capacities of the prefrontal cortex, we go into the future or into the past. That's where a lot of suffering is in part related to a lot of self referential processing. Who I was in the past and how people treated me and the mistakes I made and the regrets I have and the remorse I have and in the future. The me I will be in the future when things are getting worse and I'm not gonna find what I want and conditions are deteriorating. When you come into the present. It's reliably always the present. It is reliably always the present and in the present our suffering tends to diminish. So practices recommended in all the wisdom traditions I know about certainly in Buddhism, practices that let go of the past and let go the future and come into the present are really helpful to us.

[00:05:49] Now there's a place in the present for reflecting about your past and drawing lessons from it and coming to terms with it and healing what happened as it landed on you. Yeah, there's place for that as a practice done in the presence. And there's a place for

good planning about the future. Tying your camel, making plans and all the rest of that, doing the best you can, there's a place for that. Most people are not in the present. Lost in the past or the future. Coming back to the present. So I nominate that one for your consideration. The present and being present in the present is really reliable. Here's another one. Your good intentions. Yes, but I don't always have good intentions. Yes, But, well, I may have good intention but I go about them in bad ways. Yes, but I do have good intentions and still bad stuff happens. And that's sad. When you have generally good intentions, which is really summarized in one of the first of the three pillars of practice, in the first of the pillars of the practice typically listed in Buddhism, which are found in other contemplative traditions too, certainly such as Christianity.

[00:07:38] As a friend of mine, the scholar of contemplative Christianity, Andrew Dreitzer pointed out to me, in Buddhism the three pillar of practice in the ancient language of Pali are Sila, Samadhi and Panya, which translates as various things. I'll translate them as virtue, mental training and wisdom. And the first of these, virtue, as you rest in your good intentions as a work in progress, but knowing that you have fundamentally good intentions in your relationships and in life, wow, you can take refuge in that. Good intentions are not a guarantee of success, but they are your best odds strategy of success and certainly your best-odds way to enjoy what's called. The bliss of blamelessness, your own good intentions. Most people in my experience do not credit themselves adequately for their good intentions, now maybe there were some bad intentions. I sometimes think about how there's like the noble pony and the naughty pony, use these terms loosely, that may have a similar purpose. Let's say that the... In my case, the noble pony realizes that it's healing for me, given my history in childhood to internalize healthy social supplies. That's therapist language here, but you can understand what I mean. The naughty pony wants to impress everyone. And be really super special. Very understandable though, very understandable, but they're both running down the same trail. Just because, I don't know, the neurotic pony still has some residues of craving of those social supplies, that does not invalidate or disqualify the virtue, the kindness to myself and the ways that it ripples into benefits for others for the noble pony. To reach for healthy social supplies and internalize them.

[00:09:56] So in other words, you can have good intentions alongside not so good intentions. The not so Good intentions do not disqualify the good ones. So expanding the field of your good intentions. Expands the field of reliability. Because you can count on your good intentions. And recognizing your good intention also expands the field reliability. So I invite you to consider a challenging situation, maybe a person, a relationship, maybe an interaction or a kind of interaction. Maybe a tension with some in-laws. Or adult children, or people often write about estrangements, unfortunately, and sometimes we're targeted, we're mistreated by other people. Maybe we had a small part in the estrangement, but they've really exercised the nuclear option of cutting us off. And there really isn't or hasn't been. Real cause to do that, particularly if you have the good intention of being willing to repair. So we can't change them, they're unreliable. They're out of our control. But meanwhile, we can rest in knowing that we have good intent.

[00:11:28] So you might reflect on some challenging situations. Maybe you're dealing with a problem in your finances. Maybe you are worried about the politics in your country. Can you know for yourself what your good intentions are? Can you maybe create some good intentions related to a challenging situation? Perhaps your health, perhaps a key relationship, perhaps your finances. Perhaps your place as a citizen in America and many other countries. Mixed bag of a democracy. What are your intentions? Name one to yourself. Do you intend to vote when you can? Do you intent to put in a good day's work of effort, given your health and your age and your circumstance? Do you wish others well?

That's an intention. Do you intend to learn a little every day? That's reliable. So I highly suggest, even later, perhaps with a pad of paper, that you clarify for yourself or identify your values or intentions in particular areas. Know them for what they are. Recognize their goodness and identify with them. Rest in them and see what that does for you.

[00:13:48] You may recall that the second element typically listed in the Eightfold Path is right intention. It's summarized in its three aspects of the right intention to not harm beings. And in particular, the right attention to not carry ill will. Grievances, grudges, vengeance, revenge, meanness, malice. And third aspect, the intention, the right intention to disengage attachments from. Pleasures and pains. We may still respond to them in skillful ways, but we don't get caught up in clinging or craving as best we can. That's our intention. And you could find other intentions for yourself. What's it feel like even just to say to yourself now, I have good intentions. I have good intentions in my marriage. I have intentions as a mother. I have good intentions in my relationship with my body. I have good intentions. As a gardener, as the companion of a cat or dog. I have good intentions as I arrange these flowers. I have intentions as brush my teeth. This is a good intentions and the knowing of your good intentions is an available, reliable refuge. That's the second one I wanna suggest here. To give yourself absolution and forgiveness and release in the knowing of your good intentions. Even sometimes ones that led to a bad result.

[00:16:04] As parents, it's complicated. We can have very good intentions to establish standards for our children and call them to a higher road and create necessary consequences when needed. And those good intentions can still lead to. Getting too caught up in them, sometimes as I've learned over the years. The intentions are still good. I experienced so many of us could use the absolution, the blessing, the balm, the soothing of knowing our good intentions. Perhaps a very, very fundamental good intention is to find the reliability in increasingly resting in broadly lovingness. Part of that is intention, goodwill. A lot of it is a fundamental orientation to the world. In which we rest in for our own benefit as well as for the benefit of others. We rest in a fundamental attitude of openheartedness, recognition of suffering, compassionate wishes towards suffering, kindness, friendliness, kind of a blessing disposition toward others. That fundamental stance. You're aware of it in yourself. It becomes a kind of a reliable basis in your relationships as it gets increasingly established. Now with that reliable stance of lovingness, you may need to set boundaries, resize a relationship, speak truth to power. Bring outrage, fieryness, assertiveness, fierce compassion.

[00:18:36] Still, if you know. Now you've remained in touch with a fundamental good heartedness. As you live. That's reliable to know that you come from the trade of good heartedness. It's kind of like in relationships. There's so much we cannot influence. But if we know that we're a fundamentally loving person, then what happens in those relationships could be discombobulated or scattered. And yet we can stay in touch with the reliability, the stability of our own lovingness. Can you know that you are a fundamentally open hearted, good hearted kind hearted person? And if not, can you work on it and trust in the reliability of your efforts to become more and more this way? This is a real thing. It's not a Hallmark card I'm talking about here. This is the real deal. The great teachers all call us to love. Wow, why would they do that? Because love is both a path and a realization of enlightenment. Can you trust in love? Can you just in your own lovingness? At the root. It may be covered over. You may be hijacked. I get hijacked sometimes. I lose it. I lose touch. I don't tend to lose it, but I tend to loose touch sometimes. And can you return? Can you trust the reliability of your return to love and know that? That's a very important thing. Very not cliched or trivial.

[00:21:21] And then a fourth. Basis for reliability is awareness. Awareness is always reliable. Diana Winston and others. Strong teachers really talk about gradually becoming aware of awareness and gradually recognizing that awareness is like a field that can represent anything. It's a little bit like the screen of a television or a monitor, whatever, your phone. That screen can represent anything and it's not. By what passes through it. And so in much the same way, awareness can be aware of anything. And awareness itself though, is fundamentally available and undisturbed. It's not stained or harmed or damaged by what it is aware of. It's reliable. And as we drop into awareness. We have this reliable basis for witnessing all the wild and crazy stuff moving through awareness. All the wild and wonky stuff moving through awareness, can you trust in awareness? Meditatively, there's a typical path in which we stabilize attention. We steady the mind. And then we move into an openness that's not focused on a particular object of attention. That's an openness and embodied presence through which all kinds of things pass without carrying us away. That's the intention.

[00:23:21] In the second step and then in the third step, as the mind increasingly gets quiet, we start having more and more of a sense of abiding as awareness. That's often a progression from steadiness of mind to open spaciousness to third abiding as awareness and you can use meditation and other practices like that. And over the course of your life, increasingly you can have a state, you can feel more and more. That you're kind of in touch with an awareness that's impersonal. Awareness does not have opinions. Awareness is not gendered. Awareness doesn't have a personality. Awareness isn't just spaciousness that can represent anything. More and more, you have a sense of the reliability of that. So you might ask yourself, where are you at in your practice? Being able to rest in awareness or abide as awareness. And might it help you in meditation to explore these three steps? Steadiness of mind around something like the breath, moving to kind of an open spaciousness. There's still a fair amount happening. Moving to a general quieting so that more and more simply what's all that's there is awareness with occasionally something passing through it. You can train in that way.

[00:25:04] So to recap, to recap. I've been reflecting a lot about at a time that we feel really often rattled. I mean, politics in America, wow. You know, every day you think it can't get weirder or wilder and then it does. Okay. And in the world, many changes, many good things, many scary things all happening at once. How do we find our footing on shaky ground? And I've named for me four places to find reliability and support in a wild and wacky world. The present, good intentions, lovingness and awareness. These are really quite stable, quite available to you. How about nature broadly, life altogether? I don't want to be eaten by a shark or there's certain aspects of nature. Mosquitoes reliably are looking to sink into my body. But on the whole. We can feel sorrowful about how, for example, global warming is changing things in nature, including driving many species to extinction. We can certainly feel sorrow full about that. But nature altogether is very reliable.

[00:26:44] One thing I do often, sometimes first thing in the morning, definitely sometimes when I'm bothered by something is I try to raise my gaze to the horizon. And get a sense, I see in the distance where I live, some trees, some hills, the sky, some clouds. That for me is a reliable comfort. You know, it endures. Nature endures. The forms of nature change. Nature is evolving, but nature as nature endures. You could even extend that to, for me at least, another source of reliability is a sense of the universe. Let's call it an extension of nature. When I look out at the sky, you know, I'll know that just past the sort of very thin skin of atmosphere, seven miles thick. Planets, asteroids, comets, farther out, nearby stars, farther out other stars in our galaxy, way farther out. Lots of other galaxies. You know, the universe is reliably always the universe. Does that help you to be aware of that?

You know, it's so easy to get caught up in the most recent news cycle. And I'm not at all trying to diminish or discount. Actual harms, as well as toxic spectacle. Not at all. I'm just simply pointing to the good that is also true. That's reliably true. Such as the present moment, your good intentions, your lovingness, your awareness, and nature and the universe altogether. That's the fifth one. These are reliable.

[00:28:49] Our attention for survival purposes is routinely hijacked by what we appraise to be unreliable or bad. There's a place for that, as we deal with the bad, deal with it. But the negativity bias of the brain hijacks us, grabs us, sucks us right in. And then we obsess about it, we overlearn from it, we ruminate about it. All of which add to suffering for ourselves with ripple effects that often add to the suffering of others. What we are exploring here is you exercising power. Whoa, inside your own attention. Where do you place your attention? And amidst all this troubling, all this turbulent, what's the place for you of placing your attention in that which is reliable? In a good way for you. That's what we're talking about here. And to me, there's a fundamental rebelliousness about it. And claiming for myself. Kind of a surly way. You know, my own autonomy to locate my attention where I want and to realize that it's good for me and rippling through me to others to keep returning to that which is a source of stability and security and reliable nurturance and comfort and safety for myself. And I invite you into this. What is reliable for you? You might make a little list. You put on a little yellow sticky. You post just to bring your attention to it. Maybe playing off of the five things we've explored so far. The present or presence. Second, good intentions. Third, lovingness. Fourth, awareness. And the universe.

[00:31:02] And then there's a sixth fundamental ultimately reliable, unconditioned. The Buddha's journey, which is where we began was to find out which was a reliable basis for the highest happiness in a reality in which all conditioned phenomena arise and pass away. And therefore no conditioned phenomenon is an ultimately reliable basis for lasting happiness. Even our own universe. Even nature on this planet. I don't know if you knew this but eventually our very normal humdrum star which is on the so-called main sequence of stellar evolution will gradually use up the hydrogen that has been burning now. It's been burning for about four billion years and roughly three or four billion years from now maybe give or take. Estimates may be changing for that duration. But in any case, at certain point, billions of years in the future, our star will use up its hydrogen. It'll start burning bigger atoms like helium and then bigger and bigger ones. And the heat of that reaction will push the outer layers of our own sun. Past the orbit of Mercury. Further as it becomes a red giant. Several certainly many millions of years starting a billion or two or four in the future. It'll swallow up Mercury, it'll swallow, swallow up Venus and eventually swallow up the earth and maybe get close to Mars. And then gradually after millions of years it'll have burnt all the fuel and it'll gradually shrink down to the size of a white dwarf. So even nature, all gone.

[00:33:10] And even our universe who knows what its ultimate fate will be with entropy and gradually just expanding and cooling eventually. So even the universe because it's conditioned is not an ultimately reliable basis for the highest happiness. And the Buddha's journey took him to what he called the deathless, the unconditioned. The stainless. Nibbana, nirvana, ultimately reliable. Ground of all. Some people think he was deluded that there is no such timeless, eternal, unconditioned, vast, peaceful, perhaps aware and perhaps loving ground of all, the Buddha asserted that there was, I think. Many others have. If this is not real for you, no worries. But if it is real for you, then it is the ultimate. Reliable basis for living and loving and learning and doing the best you can in this life. Personally, it's been a real journey for me to gradually have a. Permeability and openness, a sense of this, a belief in it certainly. It's not about being special. It's about discovering for

yourself, perhaps if only intuitively that there is indeed some kind of fundamentally unconditioned, not arising, not passing away and therefore timeless, fundamental, ground of all. A weird metaphor has come to me recently in that it's as if we start out. Certainly I did. I think most of us do. We start out as if we were living on a vast bed of seaweed. It's so thick and intertwining that we think that's all there is. And we live there and we look up at the sky. We live our lives. We drive our cars over the surface of the seaweed. It's all fine. It is what it is. And maybe there are people that we know about. We read their books, we hear them talk and they say, you know, there's something underneath. There's more to it.

[00:35:46] And then we go, I just see seaweed and people hanging out on top of the seaweed. Um. And then one day. Under some condition or another. Bloop, bloop. The seaweed parts for you a little bit. Whoa. And you see that there's something underneath. And then it closes up again quickly. But you've seen what you've seen. You've had that intuition. You've that glimmer. Whoa. And maybe you kind of don't believe it. You're like, wow, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe I was, it was a mirage. It wasn't. Actually really something distinct from seaweed underneath it all. But then you get another glimmer or maybe you deliberately look for glimmers. You try to do things. You explore practices that. Tease apart the tendrils of the weeds. You begin to develop conviction that there really is something underneath it all that's there even if you can't see it in the moment. Cause you're up on the vast bed of seaweed. Maybe you do some practices. Maybe you gradually explore things. You train your consciousness. You find teachers. You find people who are scuba divers and have come back with a report. And you gradually maybe relax your mind. You gradually stop feeding some of the weeds and the tendrils start to part. And there's more and more space between them. And you become more and more aware of what's. Between the weeds of ordinary reality. What's underneath it all.

[00:37:42] And maybe over time the weeds start to thin and there's more and more of an ongoing awareness of what's underneath them. Even as you live your life on top of the weeds or amidst the weeds. And then maybe over times increasingly you find yourself. Maybe you start having a deep immersion in the underneath. You might have some very powerful experiences that leave you with great conviction about the underneath. Surveys show that roughly about a third of the people in the world report a radical non-dual self-transcendent experience in which the ordinary sense of self falls away. And essentially there's an experience of and an immersion in the underneath which gradually fades and then you're back on top of the seaweed. But you know, wow. They know something ever after. And maybe increasingly in your life you start to live more and more in touch with the underneath while managing the seaweed in your lives. That seems kind of real and kind of true and kind of an opportunity for us all. And in many ways very consistent with my understanding at least of the very specific instructions and steps laid out in early Buddhism by our primary teacher, the Buddha himself. And then you might have this as a glimmer that fades. It can become increasingly present for you.

[00:39:35] You begin to realize that the seaweed and the underneath are one. Co-occur, are one fundamental matter that in fact, every time you recognize, I'll just say it like this, that in effect the nature of the weed is the water that's underneath it. And the water interpenetrates the underneath, the ocean, penetrates. Every weed, every thought, everything. Every mountain, every quantum particle interpenetrating by the underneath. And in that knowing, there's a growing. Reliable peacefulness. Maybe I'll wrap up with two quotations from Kalu Rinpoche, first and then Sri Nisargadam Maharaj. Pretty close quote. Kalu, Rinpoche, you can look this up. There's a beautiful photograph of him in the gratitude hut at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Kalu Rinpoche is just looking into the camera. Compassionately. And the quotation is, you live. Delusion. You know nothing.

And then. You can recognize that you are nothing. And recognizing that you are nothing, you are everything. That is all. You live in delusion. You are nothing. Recognizing you are nothing, you are everything. That is all. And then we have Nisargadam. I said as a paraphrase probably. Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me, I am everything. And between these two banks, the river of my life flows.

[00:42:29] I think that's a good summary of a lot of what we've explored here and the reliability of the cultivation of your own wisdom to recognize that in fact, all forms are empty. That this thought is empty, this body is empty. Phenomena are empty, they exist emptily. In that sense, they are not a single essential thing. They are a nothing in that sense. And recognizing that, and that's a reliable recognition because it's always true about everything in ordinary reality. And recognizing through wisdom, the not-thingness of any phenomenon. Immediately opens you up into that which is unconditioned. Because emptiness itself is not conditioned. It's an inherent feature of reality, emptiness. And so there you are. The wisdom that helps you understand that you exist emptily as a local expression of everything. And the love that helps you feel connected with everything and grounded really in the. Ultimate ground of all, reliably. Reliably. No matter what happens around you, no matter what other people do or say or how they vote or what they think, you can rest in the reliability of your wisdom and your love.