

2_18_26 Talk*

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

[00:00:01] Rick contacted me yesterday and asked me if I could step in and so I don't have a prepared Dharma talk but I'm happy to be here and we'll see where it goes. I haven't been teaching, I've guest taught at various places, but I haven't been teaching my Women's Sangha for about the last eight or nine months. The reason I hadn't been teaching is because I let the Dharma have its way with me. And this is an expression that I got from Jack Kornfield when I interviewed him for the Buddhist Insight Network and I talked to him about what does it make to be a teacher, what's involved in being a teacher. And he said, well, you know, you can take all these programs and do all this stuff And, of course, it takes. Wise intention and wise effort and need to be there with it.

Speaker 1 [00:01:08] But really, when you become a teacher, you let the Dharma have its way with you and it takes you places and you begin investigating in places that you might not have been interested in before. So I let myself be guided by that over the years. And particularly this last year, when my students kept asking that I write a book from all my blog posts that I've written over the years on the way I teach the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, which is very different from how anybody else teaches it. So I was putting together blog post things and it wasn't a very exciting task. And then my good friend Laurie Elman, who is a member of this sangha, and I went on a nature retreat with Anne Krishman, a teacher some of you may be familiar with. And On that retreat, it suddenly became very clear to me what needed to happen with that book. And it was a real aha. And Lori got very excited and encouraged me. And I said, what it needs to be, it needs to be a workbook. That's what it needs to be. And people can download it and there'll be spaces for them to fill out. Follow their own practice, their own experience. One of my students had asked, couldn't this book be a coloring book? And I said, sure, why not?

[00:03:01] So I went home from that retreat intent on doing that. But then something else happened and I woke up in the middle of the night and I'd had a dream and suddenly everything came together. Yes, there would be a workbook, but it would be a companion to a novel. And the novel came to me fully blown, the whole story, everything about it. It just came to be. And it teaches. It's a teaching novel, strangely enough. I haven't heard of that. But it has multiple characters. They go on a retreat. Focused on the Eightfold Path and eight characters. Each one shares the aspect of the Eight Fold Path that they've had the biggest challenge with. And so then they were in charge of hosting that one and talking about it. So it became quite an all engulfing experience for me. And now it is just about to be published. It is out, get it, it's. Been through several readers and now it's in the hands of some teachers who have asked to do blurbs and two have agreed so far, so we'll see. So that's part of the process of getting a book out there. But this one is a novel and that makes it very different so it'll be interesting to see.

[00:04:47] But it's called into the An inner adventure novel, exploring. Main character is an elementary school teacher who has just lost her mother and has some other things going on. I won't get into the whole story, but she stumbles in to this retreat. She knows nothing about Buddhism. It goes on from there. Anyway, so we'll see. So if you are interested in being notified when it's published, just contact me through my website or add yourself to the mailing list on the website. And I don't use that mailing list a lot, but I will definitely do it for that. So if you're interested in that, let me know. But it got me totally involved. In really deeply exploring the Eightfold Path, which I love so much. And I think it's such an important thing for all of us to do. But it's interesting in the first couple of years that I was at

Spirit Rock in the early 90s, it seemed like the Eight-fold Path wasn't brought up much, at least not by my teachers. And I think it's because maybe it just sounds like maybe just another one of the Buddhist lists, or maybe it sounds like, hmm, maybe it's just another version of the Ten Commandments, but of course we know the precepts are closer to that.

[00:06:33] The Eightfold Path is really like guideposts, or in my case, what I came up with is that it's like a cooking pot on a campfire. So that's the whole basis. That's the whole basis of the story, is that one of the participants happens to think about the eight-fold path and imagines she's looking at the campfire and she sees the pot and the person who's stirring the pot. She goes, oh, it's so interesting when you think about it. It's really like the flame, the match is like intention. And a flame can be used for warmth and cooking or it can be used to destroy a home or a forest. Intention is very wise, so that match, that flame, that intention, what is our wisest intention. And then the logs and the kindling are laid in a way that uses wise effort. You can't just toss some logs there and think that that's going to work. It doesn't, right? You really need to lay them in a way, but you don't want to like make it an art form. It's not, it's kind of true to its purpose. So you have that. And then you have the pot. And the pot is wise view because it's how we hold consciousness, how we hold what beliefs we believe in, whatever that view is. And so. Pot needs to be of good quality. I use an example from my own life.

[00:08:36] In a lot of cases I had examples from my life that I put in the words of various characters and then some of them had their own experiences. But some of those were just my experiences but put in their way of seeing things. So it was very fun to do that. So... Duh. Um, someone brings up the, the fact that when they were, well, I'll tell it from my, since you're here and I'm here, um, when I, in 1966, when I lived in the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, um my roommate and I, you know, we were trying to outfit the kitchen in the cheapest way possible because we didn't have much money. We were in school and, and so we just went to this place on Geary street and they had cheap stuff and we got a couple of those old aluminum pans and everything burnt, everything burnt. So you know if you're going to cook you need a good quality pot and we all know that now but many of us have to learn it the hard way as I did.

[00:09:51] So wise view needs to be quality. It needs, we need to really examine it and make sure that it contains the wisdom. And the Buddhist wisdom is, of course, that there's no separate self, and that all is impermanence. If you're grasping and clinging and holding on to the idea that you're permanent and everything has to be permanent, then you're going to have suffering. And if you're grasping and holding on to the idea. You are a solid, separate self, and there's going to be grasping and clinging and aversion. And so that pot holds the wise view. The contents of the pot are consciousness. So there's a spoon and the spoon is stirring in the pot and that is the mindfulness practice. The top part, where the hand holds, stirring around is the mindfulness practice that we do and it is aware of, it's in the open air and it's in touch with all the senses. But submerged in the consciousness is concentration practices, that single pointed concentration and that distinction between mindfulness and concentration is a very interesting one to explore. And the base of the spoon, the scooped part of the spoon, it touches the bottom of the pot of wise view. So it's constantly being informed by wise view.

Speaker 2 [00:11:47] Now, one of the complaints one might have, and one of characters in this has a strong complaint about, well, that's all well and good, but we need to have the sila, the three virtues, the wise. Wise action and wise livelihood up front. And they have a discussion about that. Well, the Buddha was teaching largely young men, especially among the monks. Some of them were children. But we are mostly seriously adults,

beyond adults even. And we were raised with moral values. We know right from wrong, and I've it's very unlikely that you would be here tonight if your biggest strongest draw was to go out and rob a bank or kill somebody. You probably wouldn't be hanging out at your local sangha. That's just kind of the way it is. So when we're really exploring deeply in the dharma, we can make that kind of assumption, maybe erroneously, but I don't think so. So, but the beauty of having the the sila last, is that they become the steam that comes off the consciousness that's stirring. And so there's wise action and wise livelihood and wise speech. And that rings so true, doesn't it? Because if our consciousness is unwise, what comes up is not very, you know, it stinks. And it's the first thing people notice, and it's something that you can't take back. You can't, take back, you can apologize, but you can take it back. You can try to make it right. You do something that's unskillful. You try to it right as best you can. But you can undo the thing itself. And with wise livelihood, if it's unwise, You know, you're just putting it out into the world, and you don't know that it travels so far, way beyond your original intention.

[00:14:09] So for me, it's really perfect that it's the steam that's arising. So that's my little analogy and my little metaphor. It's called the cooking pot analogy, and I've been teaching it for... Almost 20 years that way with the approval of Anna Douglas, the co-founder of Spirit Rock, May She Rest in Peace. And yeah, so just putting that out there. And that is the heart of the book and the reason that the book needed to be written, that my students wanted it to be shared in that way, to just make sure that it was in the world in that way. It was only really fun and juicy for me to share it when it became a novel. So I hope that it's fun for others to read it and that with the companion workbook that it really becomes something that becomes a living practice. And I will do courses and post them on, have them on Insight Timer and things. And I'll probably have like a Tuesday night. And I'll see you in the next one. Eight Tuesday night course about it or something, I'll do something around it, all that sort of in the works. But I'd just love to open it up to a bit of discussion and we can open the chat if you would. Any questions or comments that you have about that?

Speaker 3 [00:15:53] Okay, Stephanie, I've opened the chat, so... Okay, Elaine, you need to, uh...

Speaker 4 [00:15:59] Yeah, can you hear me? Yeah. Thank you so much, Stephanie. That was lovely. I have a question and I because I'm hearing this is a contradiction and probably isn't but because there were two things that she, well, there's a lot of things you said, but one was this idea of impermanence and that we're not a solid, consistent self. But then you said if you put something out there, let's say not a kind act or not a mindful act, you can't take it back. So, I mean, so what I'm hearing is, I may not be a permanent self, but if I put an unmindful, unkind act out there, that act is permanent?

Speaker 1 [00:16:59] The result of this permanent? Maybe a nice, I don't know how nice, but a way to look at it is everything affects everything. Everything's interwoven, everything affects everything, so my words, whether skillful or unskillful, will go out into the world and will say something. Just to everybody take a moment and just think of something, somebody in your childhood, whether it's a parent or a sibling or a kid on the playground, something somebody said. Maybe it was a high school boyfriend or girlfriend. Something somebody said, and I'd love to see. If there's anybody who doesn't have something that stayed with them that hurt them to the quick or just really stayed with him.

Speaker 5 [00:18:06] That's trick.

Speaker 1 [00:18:08] That's true, isn't it? And so that's why it's, you know, our, our speech is so important. What is wise speech? But how can we cultivate wise speech if we don't have, you know if we, don't the others in place? We really can't, we really can. I took a wonderful eight months. When I knew that I was going to be writing this book, of course, I went around and read and attended everything I possibly could to make sure I was covering all the bases. And I took a wonderful course through Spirit Rock with Mark Coleman, one of my teachers, and Don Mauricio, who's in Montreal, I believe. And we met once a month. And they taught it in the normal order. And when we had breakout groups, it was so clear that teaching it in that normal order. We were still, everybody was, when we were talking about wise speech and wise action, I mean, one person said, well, I know I shouldn't swear. Well, that's not the point, that doesn't, you know, I mean that's what it's about. It's still that whatever we thought wise speech should be from the standpoint of, you now, not from that deep. Wisdom that rises up. What wise speech is, is loving kindness and compassionate, and knowing when not to speak, when words just won't do it. I think that I'm bringing it last, but does that answer your question, Elaine? I just want to make sure I did address it. You saw a conflict.

Speaker 4 [00:20:06] Parent. Yes, thank you, Stephanie. It does. It does. And thank you for doing that because it was, you know, sitting in my mind like I'm thinking about this not correctly. Thank you.

Speaker 1 [00:20:20] I'm glad. Somebody I noticed asked what the name of the book was, and it's called Into the Hills, an inner adventure novel exploring the noble eightfold path.

Speaker 3 [00:20:40] It's 701 Stephanie. There's a fundamental question. Why do we suffer so much if you hold on to something?

[00:20:47] For the grasping. Well, thank you. Thank you for that art. So Catherine, why do we suffer so much? If you can just, you can just... You can just really sense into the tightness of the grasping and clinging in the first place, just the physical discomfort of clinging to something. Maybe you can pick something up right now. Now I have this glass. If I hold on too tight, I could break the glass. I'm not that strong, but theoretically. And then there'd be the shards and they would break. Grasping and clinging is the lack of acknowledgement that everything's impermanent. That were impermanent. I had a conversation with my daughter who's turning 50 this year, very exciting. And she said, you know, I'm really struggling because you and dad are now at ages where people die. I go, yeah, I just went to my 60th reunion and they have this. All the obituaries of everybody in my high school class who's died, I go, yeah, yeah we're pretty aware of that. But she just, she's just suffering because she's grasping and clinging. She doesn't want to imagine a world without her parents in it, and who does? Honestly, who does.

Speaker 1 [00:22:23] But we get, this is impermanence is part of the nature of being alive. It's part of nature of everything. And it's not just something we have to resign to, it's actually, I don't know if we want to celebrate it, but we wouldn't get born if we didn't die. Everything arises and falls away, everything changes, the seasons, everything. Um, and it's all interconnected and interwoven and so beautiful. And the best thing we can do for ourselves if we are suffering and thinking about impermanence is to take a walk in nature and not be talking away with our friends, just kind of getting our steps in or something like that, but really just being either alone or companionably alone where you agree to be in silence in nature. The other day, my husband and I took a walk up to Lake Lagunitas, which is nearby, and just such a celebration of life as you watch the turtles sunning and the slow-moving turtle climbing up on a log, and we could really relate, you know, as our

daughter says, you're getting to that age. We could really related to that slow- moving turtle as one arm goes up, the next one goes up. It was really a moment, and then we were treated to an otter, and we don't usually see otters, and it was hanging over a low wall, for those of you that know Lake Blataganidas, it's got a, before the dam, there's this man-made thing that sits on the water. Anyway, the otter was breached over it, and was grabbing things in the water, and just yum, yum, Yum, yum, yum. Just so happy. So much fun to see a happy otter. And then, satisfied, he turned around and sleekly swam away and was just so beautiful.

Speaker 3 [00:24:41] Stephanie Nancy asked at 704, what is the difference between wise action and wise livelihood?

Speaker 1 [00:24:51] So wise action is every action that we do. In life and wise livelihood is how we are with wise speech and wise action in the workplace and is that workplace wise action. Like I used to work at an advertising agency and it was a good-hearted advertising agency, but by the time I left after eight years, I had written an eight-page treatise. I have written a whole thing on the evils of advertising. And how advertising was really the root of all evil. I was really ready to quit. You know when you're working for something that is a benefit, that's a benefit and you know when you're offering something in the world and that that is of benefit and, you know, when you're just towing the company line and you're kind of going along to get along and you're getting your paycheck, but you know that. There's some dirty business or something's going on, and you're not speaking up because you're afraid. So you can see how that creates the sense of separation and defensiveness and fear and self-protection. That's just really not very skillful. So that would be, but from the Buddha's time, it was really the few particular things were unwise. In our times, I think it's easy enough for those of us who are paying attention to see when something, when something that we're doing to make a living is harming someone else. You know, if we're using pesticides, if we are cheating someone, if we aren't paying our employees sufficient money, if, you know, all kinds of things like that. That's the difference. One is in the workplace and the other is just all the things we do in daily life. Another question?

Speaker 3 [00:27:16] Stephanie Scott asks at 7.05, would you please elaborate on the notion that we are not separate, we are all connected?

[00:27:27] So the basic, absolute basic, basic, basic thing with Buddhism is Anicca, Anada, and Dukkha, or Anata. I never remember which way people pronounce it and everybody pronounces it differently. We can easily see a Nietzsche. We see the seasons and impermanence. Anatta is trickier. It's harder to see because we are so caught up in believing that we are separate. When we recognize that we're all made of the same stuff, inherently, there's only so many elements, and we're ALL made of it. Nature of impermanence reminds us that this self comes together and it comes apart. The Buddha had some recommendations for dealing with this. He suggested that you go sit in the area where the um what do you even call that we don't have one the carnal whatever what's it called anyway The place where the dead bodies are lying. The charnel grounds. The churnel grounds, thank you, Bill. So he says, Go sit in the charnal grounds, because this is the deepest teaching, or one of the deepest teachings, is to really understand that there's nothing... This is the basis of the five aggregates of clinging, of who we believe ourselves to be.

Speaker 1 [00:29:15] So, the first is, we believe ourself to be this body. Especially those of us who've spent, you know, quite a number of years running around the sun, we know that

this body is not the same body we were born with. It's changed quite a bit, it's got things going on. You know, every day a different complaint. I mean, you know, this is nature informing us of the impermanence of the body. But we say, okay, So. Our body, that's not who we are. That's obviously changing and stuff. But it's handy, people can recognize, I can tell one person from another because we're a community and we see the signals we recognize and this is how we can build in community. But then you go into the feeling tones and you go up this list and I'm not gonna go through the whole list, but ultimately you get to the top aggregate. And it's consciousness. And you go, well, wait, certainly I'm consciousness. But then you go well, we'll wait. When I have surgery and they put me under sedation, I'm unconscious. Where am I then? And it just a process of, and it's very good for, especially as we're aging, to really relax and let go and trust that this is just part of the nature of things. And, you know, um... People who have, who we've loved and lost still live on within us in our memories, but in time, even that will fade. And so this is the nature of it. And it's a celebration of life to really understand it. And it is a way to kind of relax and say, let's not take ourselves so seriously here. Anyway, but when we grasp and cling and hold on to that, and especially when we build fortresses of solid separate self.

[00:31:26] So we're building fortresses with bricks of, well, these are my looks and these are my accomplishments and these are my this and these are my that and this is the amount of money I have. And these are the awards I've gotten. And this is this and this. We are separating ourselves in such a significant way. And it's a defensive posture. And when we remind ourselves that we're not separate and we're permanent, then we can relax and dance with life and dance with each other and be in community. The rest of the species on the earth all know this. The trees are all talking to each other, underground and You know, life is a celebration. So when we're holding ourselves apart and saying, yeah, but, you know, I got promoted to this position. So, you now, hello, you salute me. I mean, that's no fun. The fun is coming together in community. And that's why I love sangha so much. It's just such a joy to be together and to explore ideas together with people who care about it as much as I do. But thank you for the question. I'm sure it didn't answer it fully, but it gives you a place to explore. And there are many places to explore

Speaker 3 [00:32:50] Stephanie, Linda asked, it's 7.08 and you've touched on this already, but what can we actually do to accept impermanence as opposed to resisting it? She's really unhappy about that.

Speaker 1 [00:33:06] I think the more you meditate, the more you start having insights. Maybe go on a retreat if you can go on a retreat. I highly recommend going on a retreat because we get so caught up in our daily. Goings-on, and that becomes the forefront of our existence. And it's hard to imagine that anything could be more important. But when we take time out and we go for a few days, a week or longer, we begin to relax and release that separate seeming idea, to whatever degree we're able, and it really, um, really frees us from that delusion.

Speaker 3 [00:34:06] Stephanie Fia asked at 7.15 she said, I'm teaching a meditation class and it has to be non religious. But it's hard to separate out Buddhist teaching from meditation practice, for instance, impermanence from practice that includes letting go. Do you have any suggestions?

Speaker 1 [00:34:26] So is this in an institutional setting?

Speaker 6 [00:34:29] I live in a senior complex and, yeah, it has to be non-religious. Yeah, it is, I mean, it's policy of the place.

Speaker 1 [00:34:42] Well, many people. Who especially in the West don't really consider Buddhism to be a religion because it's non-theistic and certainly if anybody followed the Walk for Peace monks and saw how they were received going through from Fort Worth, Texas to Washington, D.C. Over the course of 108 days. Walking 14 to 20 miles a day with their dog Aloka and seeing how they were received by people who clearly weren't Buddhist, but they just were so touched by the message of peace. And I think that especially in a senior community, you're dealing with a community, which I can certainly understand of people who are having to come in some kind of relationship too. End of their lives. And there's no reason for anybody to go in and change their ideas about anything, but to just have skillful mindfulness practice of relaxing and releasing and letting go. That's very, very helpful. It's certainly one small part of what we look at as in practicing Buddhism and studying and investigating Buddhism. For that situation. You know, it's enough. It's enough to relieve some suffering. It's compassionate action. So it's very skillful and I thank you so much for doing it.

Speaker 6 [00:36:40] Can I ask one more? So is it helpful to sort of say, well, this is what Buddha said, but it's not a religious teaching that you have to believe in. It's a philosophy or something that you can...

Speaker 1 [00:36:59] Maybe the most important thing you could say is that the Buddha said, don't take my word for it, find out for yourself. So the Buddha was really just a very early psychologist by some standards. I mean, you know, there's so many different schools of Buddhism and in some of them he is a deity and and there are many Buddhas talked about and... But in the Theravada tradition, it's pretty clear-cut that the Buddha was very clear. One of the things he said was, I am not a god and I just want people to wake up. Whether we're promoting people waking up or we're giving people relief from their suffering, I think people receive what they need to receive. I don't think that we determine what that is. I highly suggest that you let the Dharma have its way with you and it'll guide you because it will. Allow you to be responsive rather. I know it when you have that feeling like, oh I can't go here, I can go there, sort of feel like Stephen Colbert, you know, like, I can say this, I say that, but I trust that with your generosity of spirit that you'll find a way and I support you.

Speaker 6 [00:38:47] Say this is one of the things Buddha talked about, trying to not make it sound like this is Buddha's teaching. I mean, I'm just trying to think how to put things so that it doesn't sound like I'm

Speaker 1 [00:39:10] I think you can freely use the Buddhist teachings without attributing it to anything, just from your own experience. You don't really have to teach it. You just have to allow people to have the experience of it, that's what I would do. Thank you.

Speaker 6 [00:39:35] It's a helpful thing.

Speaker 3 [00:39:36] Stephanie, in that regard, there's a comment at 719 that all of John Kabat-Zinn's teachings are without religion.

Speaker 1 [00:39:47] So you could, and that's right. And so you could easily, he came out of the Theravadan spirit rock tradition and he managed to make mindfulness suitable for institutional use for students and others. So maybe have that as a reference book, his works.

Speaker 3 [00:40:17] Kathleen has a raised hand.

Speaker 5 [00:40:20] Yeah, Art and Stephanie, at 722, Catherine asked a question, which I think is an enticing one. Is suffering in itself a teacher?

Speaker 2 [00:40:37] Yes.

Speaker 5 [00:40:39] I'll let you speak to that.

Speaker 1 [00:40:45] It's a teaching, it's a painful teaching. So there's the story of the analogy metaphor of the first and second dart. So the first dart is painful. So we've gotten hit by a dart and it's painful. The second dart. Our way of receiving it and all the thoughts we have and how we exacerbate that suffering. So we have a bad experience. Yeah, it was a bad experience. It happened and now it's not happening. But if we say, oh, this horrible thing happened to me and I'm going to tell all my friends about it and I am going to live for weeks and months on end. And it goes on and on and I'm really having a hard time getting over this really horrible experience. That's the second dart. This is not to say that we don't give time and space for grief and recovery and all of those things because that is real, but that first and second dart is a good thing to notice. That addresses what you're talking about. So.

Speaker 3 [00:42:08] Okay, Ashan has raised his hand, so we'll ask him to unmute. There we go.

Speaker 2 [00:42:18] Yeah.

Speaker 7 [00:42:20] Thank you. Thank you for your mention. How do you guess?

Speaker 2 [00:42:31] That we are.

Speaker 7 [00:42:33] I live in Minnesota, Simcoe. Have a nice day.

Speaker 1 [00:42:40] So did you follow the Walk for Peace monks?

Speaker 7 [00:42:51] I didn't have any equipment or information at the beginning. So on the halfway I saw the invitation, but at the time I had many schedules, many things to do for my meditation classes and other teacher training classes and so I had a lot of things to do.

Speaker 1 [00:43:21] Yes, I imagine life is very busy, many obligations. Well, thank you for all you do.

Speaker 7 [00:43:30] Yeah, thank you for your mention.

Speaker 2 [00:43:34] Yeah, certainly.

Speaker 7 [00:43:39] Well, where are you by the way?

Speaker 1 [00:43:41] I am in the San Francisco Bay area in San Rafael and Marin County, which is where the sangha was born. It was called the San Rafael group. Is it still called the group?

Speaker 7 [00:43:52] I see. On 24th, I will write there. Oh, yeah? Yeah. 24 and until 18th of March I will be there.

Speaker 2 [00:44:07] Wow.

Speaker 7 [00:44:11] Yeah, one of my plans is just to step in. Thank you for your time.

Speaker 2 [00:44:21] Thank you.