

8_20_25 Talk*

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

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] About that meditation, and I appreciated the kind feedback from many, someone asked me, Margaret asked me when I speak of vastness and stillness, it reminds me, Marguerite, of the statement that nothing, two exclamation points, is separate, no thing. Is that what you're pointing to? Here's where it has helped me personally a lot to find a kind of map that gives me a sense of the path. And it's important, of course, not to be attached to our maps. And as they say, the menu is not the meal. What I'm referring to, as you can see in my response to Margaret, is what I observe is that there are three kind of sort of layers that can be usefully understood, each in their own right. And so as your mind gets quieter, your body gets quieter. Your mind gets quieter, aided by a sense of needs met enough in the moment. Maybe with a background of kind of basic well-being, you're okay in the moment. As that happens, there can be a sense increasingly of abiding as awareness or abiding as presence in which through which experiences come and go appearing, occurring, passing away. So there you are, this kind of awareness.

[00:01:46] And then there can be a... A knowing of the inherent openness, vastness, in awareness, in presence, with itself an inherent stillness. Because the awareness or the presence is stable. Disturbance has passed through it. Awareness itself is undisturbed. So there's a stillness. Deep quiet inside you, that has a quality of peacefulness. So this is in the psyche itself. This can be understood as, okay, that's what's happening in the body-mind when it's getting pretty quiet. Oh, we can discover and enjoy and increasingly Abide as and identify with. Qualities of vastness. And feel free to choose other words that work for you. Vastness, stillness, and peacefulness. That's at the level of the psyche. More deep play, or? In this map. Second, can be a sense of the vastness of the Big Bang universe, the inherent vastness of it, and the ways in which the universe as the universe is always the universe, and therefore there's a profound fundamental stillness in my poetic word, almost. The allness of everything. In which there is one single allness of everything. So as allness, it's always allness.

[00:03:52] So there's a stillness to it. And this is intuitive. You can have flashes of this sometimes in these non-dual experiences where there's this sense of oneness where basically you just recognize what's true. The universe as a whole is of course vast. Everything's connected to everything else vastly. And as they whole, it is always the whole and thus still. And there can be an extremely deep peacefulness that's available to you as you recognize that you yourself, your apparent body mind is simply a passing patterning of this all-abiding wholeness. Of the universe altogether. And if this is merely poetic for you or intellectual for you, no problem. This is a map that charts movement. And people really do and can increasingly be grounded in this sense of kind of an incredible inner peace. It's like the wave knowing that It's being made by the whole ocean, and is itself rippling out into the ocean, and that its very nature is water. Ooh. This is an invitation.

[00:05:24] And you can see what I'm describing and the distinctions I'm marking in this loose map you can find in wisdom teachings throughout the world and I find it's really helpful to kind of clarify are we talking about the deep stillness in the psyche, the ordinary psyche? Are we talking about the oneness of the Big Bang universe, the natural universe? Or third? Third of the map, are we talking about a mysterious... Underlying. Ground of all, that is absolute, or that is unconditioned in contrast to the conditioned unfolding of the Big Bang universe. Unconditioned. Timeless, in contrast to the time-bound unfolding of the

natural universe. And that's the ultimate ground of all. The Buddha pointed to it in his use of the term unconditioned or he described it mainly through negation. The deathless, the unborn, the undying. Go further as various religious traditions might. Language like spirit or divine or God, kind of stayed with sort of minimalist, unconditioned, vastness, boundlessness, timelessness, thus stillness, and in which a profound ultimate peacefulness can be found, which was his own journey of awakening, moving into cessation and then returning. Profound peacefulness. Nibbana, nirvana.

[00:07:19] So that's the third, and we can have intuitions of that third if we do, we can a sense of it. We can even have a sense of it co-mingling with the conditioned relative unfolding universe in which our bodies and minds, you know, mainly live. If you don't relate to that third step as, and many do not, it's okay. I'm not going to argue about it. I will say that many of us, including me, have a very real felt sense of it and informed belief in it. And in my view, that is what the Buddha was pointing to in that third. He was pointing to that in his movement through one conditioned experience after another into the ultimate basis for a lasting happiness and peace, the unconditioned, that third step. So I'm pointing to all three of those in that meditation and respecting you, frankly, to do something that, as I grumble briefly, grumble, grumble. That many teachers of mine in my early encounters with Buddhism, they just weren't willing to really name and invite the second and especially the third. Level. To me, that's kind of condescending, and I don't want to do that with you. And if it's not real for you, it's really okay. Or if it is real for but you're not there, like the top of Mount Everest is real for me, I'm never going to be there. Frankly, it seems like a lot of work to get up to the top for that sucker these days.

[00:09:15] Anyway, now I'd like to talk with you about something that's very practical and psychological. That has to do with three fundamental words, and I'm gonna tell you what the words are, that are, I would say, at the essence of 90% or more of the early teachings of the Buddha. In the later evolutions in the Mahayana traditions and Tibet and Chan and Zen and even Pure Land, there are different elaborations, but in the core of the Buddhadharmā, I'm going to argue that a lot of what the Buddha taught boils down to three words. Here are the three words in Pali, a language, a key language of early Buddhism. First word is dukkha. Now dukkhas can be understood in two ways. It could be understood first as the inescapable challenges that are simply a fact of living. Are three fundamental facts of living that the Buddha pointed to. This is not an exclusive list. There's more to it than that.

[00:10:22] But certainly, facts of life include impermanence, interdependence, and I'll translate Dukkha as challenges. There's no end to the impermanence, to the interdependents, and to the challenges of living. Enlightened or not, these will continue. And, noted in the Four Noble Truths as the first of these, there is the kind of dukkha that we create ourselves. That is not simply an object of unavoidable, inescapable discomfort or challenging condition in life, but is, to use the metaphor, the second darts that we add ourselves to the inescapable impermanence, interdependence, and challenges. Existence. Buddhism has a rap, has a very grim, dour, what, you know, grumpy religion. And in some ways the fact that it's squarely faces the first dart inescapable dukkha and the second dart of the mental reactivity and anguish and suffering we create ourselves. The fact that Buddhism really foregrounds those things, you know helps people really appreciate it. And the Buddha is not bullshitting us. It's not fooling around.

[00:11:47] That said, if you think of the difference between unavoidable challenges in life and the ultimately avoidable mental suffering we create for ourselves and others, wow, when you recognize there's a difference between those two, that is incredibly helpful. And

it's incredibly... Blunt in the ways that it foregrounds our own responsibility. Practice as best we can with the challenges of life, both out in the world, improving the world. There's a place for that. And in terms of how they unavoidably impact us, like aging, disease, and death, for example, it's on each individual to find their way, to develop strengths inside, like coming here to this program, this Wednesday meditation, to deal with challenges. And it's us to deal with. The habit patterns, the reactivities, the biological conditioning that we have as animals that add suffering to pain, that add suffering to challenges.

[00:13:01] So we have both a beautiful, hopeful opportunity and a clear-eyed recognition of our own responsibility to do something about that opportunity. Super, super hopeful. Second word. So now we have, and I'm going to speak mainly here about Dukkha in either of its two forms. Inescapable first dart dukkha. The dukkha we construct ourselves, second dark dukkah. Now I'm going to introduce a second word, sukkha. Sukkha contrasts to dukkah. Sukkah is the root of the word in the Indo-European languages, Sanskrit at their root, for sucrose and thus sugar. Sukkah has to do with enjoyable experiences of all sorts. There is the... Momentary sukkha of drinking a little water if your throat like mine is getting a little dry. There is the physical sukha. Of a deeper, fuller breath. There's the suka of watching our children thrive. Now the suka of watching a kind of a cute little kitten video. There's this suka. Knowing that you put in a good day's work, and it's honorable. No blame. Good for you. Suka. So we have suka in contrast to dukkha. Now it is true that all suka, all that is involved with well-being in simple ways and in very subtle and vast ways, all those experiences, like all experiences. Both dukkha experiences and sukha experiences are impermanent. We don't mind dukkha's experiences being impermanent. We tend to not like it when the sweetness fades.

[00:15:13] But on the other hand, if we, you know, get to this, you know can allow Sukha to arise and allow it to persist and allow to pass away, then we don't add dukkha to it. Okay? So, and I like the fact that these words rhyme dukkah, sukkah. There's a third word, very important word. I think arguably it's the most important word, probably, or it's in the top five. Maybe they're all tied for first place. I'll have to think with the other four. Our nominations are welcome. This is the word tanha. So we have dukkha, D-U-K-K, H-A, sukha, S-U, K, H, A. This is the way they're typically spelled in English. These are ancient, ancient, ancient words. And then we have tanha, which is typically translated as craving. Tanha is the second noble truth. There is craving. And when craving... And the cause of second dart, dukkha, the cause, I'll say, suffering, distinct from challenges, the cause of suffering, or certainly a fundamental cause of suffering, arguably the deep root cause of the suffering, is tanham.

[00:16:38] Now, craving can sound like, oh my gosh, I gotta get my heroin. I've never experienced that, but you know, I've nearly drowned. I really, when I was panicking during the drowning experience, I really craved air. There's a place for craving, which is characterized in the body. It feels like pressure, insistence, must, drivenness, demand, being really revved up, maybe. You know, you got to run into a burning building to get your kid out, or his teddy bear. I was there at one time. And your dissertation disk for your PhD, and your car keys, and your shoes. As I ran into the apartment building with my wife yelling at me, don't be stupid, don't be stupid. I managed to make it out with the teddy bear dissertation disks, shoes and car keys. But anyway, there's a place for that. It's not that it's bad, But we can see that a lot of the time. When we work backwards from being upset about something, we can work backwards and we can ask ourselves, where was the craving in all this? Challenges occur, let's say other people frown at you or say something or they don't like something you're doing. It's maybe unpleasant, okay. What made it even worse in your own mind? Probably some form of craving. Subtle. Insistence, demand,

often a lot of self, contraction, contraction around it. The Buddha is basically calling us in a whole variety of ways to be mindful of craving and gradually decondition the habits of craving.

[00:18:38] Now, very, very briefly, I'm gonna summarize a whole bunch of stuff. When you look at craving neurobiologically, there are essentially three things we can do. Number one, so craving is a response to an unmet need. Animals crave related to their needs. This is really important to address. People don't tend to talk about this in Buddha world, but it's cravings about needs. All right, what do we need? To the extent that we can intervene in the world with all kinds of things, you know, good plumbing, fresh water. No more global warming, civil society, safe neighborhoods, stop signs, neighbors who control their dogs barking in the middle of the night. To the extent that we can intervene in the world to meet ordinary, reasonable human needs, that's a good thing. That will reduce the basis for craving. If you're running for your life in a war zone, of course you are craving things. Because you're not safe. You're not fed. Your children are not fed, you know. There's a lot of hostility and hatred flying around. Of course craving will arise.

[00:20:05] So number one, intervening in the world, in our relationships, in our neighborhoods, in or buildings. And society altogether to reduce unmet needs, to meet ordinary natural human needs, and to look for models in the world of communities and countries that are more successful at this in general than many, many other countries in the world. Okay, that's worth doing. That's engaged Buddhism in part. Second major thing to do, with second and third have to do with our own minds. Build up various psychological strengths inside, resources, skills, emotional intelligence, secure attachment, executive functions, self-worth, inside, so forth, so fourth. Build up these qualities inside, these strengths, so that when challenges come, you can meet them with a mind that is, and body that is generally free of craving, or certainly not. Hijacked by craving. If we don't have the strengths we need inside ourselves to deal with the challenges that come to us, of course, it's that then our needs become unmet and then craving follows. But if challenges come and we still find ways to meet our needs in the face of those challenges and meet our need skillfully, there's no basis for craving. Yeah, very indirect.

[00:21:50] You might have your own inner list these days. What is it that you're trying to develop inside yourself so that you can meet your needs more effectively, including very, by needs I mean, including quite broadly, important longings for your heart. And then third thing to do ourselves about craving is to repeatedly internalize the felt sense of needs met enough in the moment so that more and more an emotional memory, even as you deal with the wobbly challenges of life, you feel centered in resilient well-being as emotional memory deep inside yourself. So that when challenges land on you, there's already a felt sense of an enoughness of peacefulness, contentment, and love inside you, okay? That's kind of a serious summary of major practice. So now I wanna get to the interplay of these three words. I was talking with my friend John last week and he can, he's traveled in India and he's a very sweet guy, John Prendergast, who's gonna be a guest teacher as well in the future. Phenomenal non-dual teacher with amazing books. His most recent book is called The Deepest Ground. I wrote the foreword for it. And I think his first book is called In Touch, or first book he did by himself, I think. Anyway, beautiful books. So we were talking, and I realized that... There is sukha-sukha, sukha dukkha, dukkhasukha and dukkadukka. So bear with me here. Sometimes we start with the dukkha of challenge and we react to it to create suffering. Let's call that dukkhadukkha.

[00:23:59] Now, other times there is a challenge and the managing of that challenge, the engagement of that challenges leads to sukka, leads to a reward, a fulfillment. Maybe a

feeling of accomplishing something, maybe the challenge is how it's scary to speak from your heart in a interaction or relationship. Maybe the challenge is lifting that weight or holding that yoga pose. Maybe the challenge is grinding it out, as I did in three separate grad schools. You know, the challenge of waking up in the middle of the night to walk your baby up and down the hallway. And yet the managing of that dukkha can lead to the sukkha of fulfillment, gratifications of rewards. Setting yourself up in life to be able to build things and make things and have things. Perhaps the dukkha of how it's scary to assert yourself in a relationship or speak from the heart in your relationship can lead to a good outcome. That's the dukkha that leads to sukkha. Belivajahn Chah said that there are two kinds of dukkha. There is the dukkha that will lead to less dukkha and more sukkha. And there is the dukkha that leads to more dukkha. And he said, if you do not have more of the former, the dukkha, that leads to the sukkha, you will surely have more of the latter, the dukkha that leads to more dukkha. And I find it really actually helpful to realize that, yeah, in this life, there are experiences that are not so enjoyable in the moment, exercise of certain kinds, definitely comes to my mind here. Persisting in a task that's boring because you need to finish it out.

[00:26:08] I was talking with some people earlier today about their young child, let's say a second grade son, who really likes doing what he likes doing. And he just, he likes doing things that he's immediately good at. But if he's not immediately good at it, he doesn't wanna persist in getting good at it. He doesn't want to tolerate the dukkha of practicing, like throwing a ball or hitting a softball or, you know, something in schoolwork. He just doesn't want to deal with that. And yet, it would be really valuable for him over time to learn to be more comfortable with that. Reasonable amount of dukkha, which will lead to the sukkha of getting really good at some things. And it's really helpful to think of it like this, you know, what is, and for you in your own case, is there some dukkha that would be good for you to tolerate and allow and include in your life for the sake of a greater sukkha, a greater fulfillment, a greater happiness?

[00:27:14] There's a proverb in Buddhism. Wisdom is not reciting the sacred scriptures. Wisdom, true wisdom, is choosing a greater happiness over a lesser one. And very often, it is the greater happinesses that require some dukkha at the front end. Sitting in meditation sometimes, disengaging from, you know, watching another episode of a TV show and instead getting to bed at a reasonable hour so you can get up the next morning and, you know meditate or, you now, organize your day. There's a certain amount of sukkha that, pardon me, dukkha, certain amount challenge or discomfort that we need to face and tolerate to have the greater rewards we care about. So I invite you. To consider four things here, and we're working through the list.

[00:28:13] One, for you, how do you add craving to challenges in life that creates suffering for yourself and others? Second question, which we're now focused on, that's the first one is dukkha-dukkha. Think of four categories and yourself for these four categories. Second, dukkhas that lead to sukkha, would it be appropriate for you? Well, first of all, do this. What dukkhas have you tolerated and put up with for the sake of the greater good, the sukkha that you really care about? And can you honor yourself for that? That's really important. As you look ahead, I think most people in this gathering are past the midline of a lifespan, factually. So you look ahead, huh, is there some dukkha, some challenge that would be appropriate for you to take on and not swerve away from or procrastinate about for the sake of the greater good, the greater happiness? That's a question. Now we're onto the third category. This is... Sukha-dukkha, the sukkha that leads to dukkha. And this is an incredibly interesting category. Think of the various pleasures we seek of different kinds. Sense pleasures, food, intoxicants, sexuality... Buying things, think of the pleasures we

seek or other kinds of pleasures such as the pleasures in righteousness or superiority or proving your point. That kind of sukka can lead to dukkha, can lead to discomfort, can lead to creating challenges for yourself of various kinds, wear and tear on the body, issues in relationships. We get seduced by sukka.

[00:30:32] Two weeks ago, I repeated a saying that has really stood out for me in the Buddha Dharma. The Buddha was basically saying, as you go through life, be aware of three things. The gratification, the danger, and the escape. Thus the gratification means that there's some sukka present. The honeyed tip. The danger being the poison barb. How might that sukka, particularly if craving is added to it, lead to... And then third, what's the escape in terms of personal practice? So for myself, I observe good intentions. Sukka starts with good intent. Oh, wow, it would be really helpful, you know, to advise my adult kids about how to live their life better. Yeah, what a good idea. That's Sukka. And you know it's a passing thought, fine. But if I get driven around that, like I want them to agree with me, or I want them to. Pat me on the back, oh, what a wise father I have. Ooh, slippery slope. That's the sukka. That's a gratification leading to the danger. It's gonna get me in trouble. And the escape just about always involves the release of tanha, the release craving.

[00:32:04] So it's very helpful to contemplate on the sukka that leads to dukkha. I think politically these days, there's a lot of opportunity here. There's the initial, I'll call it sukka, of appropriate moral outrage, if this or that, or a sense of camaraderie and fellowship with others who are similarly, let's say, outraged. That's kind of where it starts. That alone, very understandable, very much in the service of good. But we can be aware of where that outrage And that sense of, you know, commonality becomes helpless, seething resentment. Now we're in Dukkha land. Sukka has led to Dukka when craving tanha gets added. Sukka plus tanha equals Dukka. It's so easy for Sukka to become Dukka. In other words, I'm just thinking there for a moment about, you know, just good intentions. Wanting, I look at where I live and I think, oh, I'd like a plant here in my garden. But then fairly quickly, I'm caught up in that project and getting the plant and planting the plant and bringing water to the plant. And what do I do? The plant turns brown and, oh, now sometimes it's worth it. Sometimes it's just worth it, but very easily these good intentions can become complications. The mind and brain proliferate around them and suddenly we're in dukka land, okay? So, beware... The sukka plus tanha that leads to dukkha. And then, last and certainly not least of our four, we have sukka-sukka. And just saying these words cracks me up, so I'm going to say them. Sukka-Sukka, you may have noticed that, I'm gonna make a loose distinction here, worldly sukka, worldly goals, worldly gratifications, worldly pleasures and passions. Are a little vulnerable to the addition of craving, the addition Tanha. When they arise that initial sense of good intent or enjoyability or pleasure, it's fine. The Buddha was not against that.

[00:35:01] One of the breakthroughs for him, distinct from the Jain tradition of his time, was to be not against pleasure per se, even intense. Pleasure of one kind or another. He was not against that. He just simply pointed out that as soon as we add craving to it, woop, suffering begins. So worldly sukka is vulnerable to the addition of craving. So we need to really be on our toes when we are engaging worldly pleasures because they're vulnerable to the brain's biological tendency for raw survival purposes, the legacy of 600 million years of life and death struggles and the evolution of the nervous system. The brain is very inclined to add to ordinary pleasures. So we need to be especially mindful of that process, especially alert to the arising of tanha, the arising or craving, and try to relax and try let it dissipate and allow the suka to be present and allow it to pass away, as it naturally and permanently will.

[00:36:14] On the other hand... There are, they're called unworldly, which is a funny translation because they're in the world typically, although ultimately maybe they're beyond the natural world. But anyway, the deeper, more sublime sukkha of vastness and stillness, or just like a vast love and unconditional love, a sense of... Just jaw-dropping gratitude, gobsmacked with gratitude, flooded with beauty. We have a sense, well, I think you do, that there are certain forms of sukha, I'll call it profound sukha. Better than unworldly. That is not vulnerable to craving. People don't tend to crave the sublime. They don't tend to crave. Profound inner peace. Sometimes people do, but on the whole, it's just there, it's wonderful. There might be a longing to come home to it, a longing for return, but it doesn't have that quality of contraction. So you might ask yourself, what are those fulfillments? What are those enjoyments that do not call for contraction and pressure and pushing or grasping. They just don't really call for it. And that kind of sukkha generally does not lead to dukkha. That is the fourth category of sukkha-sukha.

[00:38:13] And it is simply true that as people ground themselves in those three layers of the depths that we explored in the meditation, each one of those is a sukkha that does not lead to dukkha. I suspect as we finish the meditation... You might have been glad that the bell rang. On the other hand, you might have thought, oh, this is so sweet. But there probably was not that kind of pressured, contracted clinging to the experience. That's the hallmark of tanha craving, at least the suffering. If you also had a sense of, or began to get a bit of a taste or touch, of the vastness and stillness and peacefulness in allness altogether, or even the unconditioned ground of all, those are openings into sukha-sukha, the sukha that is not so vulnerable to craving and suffering. And the more that we can abide in sukkha-sukka, the more happily and resiliently we can live. And also, of course, the more that we endure and tolerate and even choose appropriate dukkha that leads to sukkah, healthy dukkah. That's good. And also the more that we be alert. To the tendencies of Sukha leading to, craving and thus Dukkha, you know, the better.

[00:39:57] And then last, of course, when we face Dukha challenges of life, try to minimize our reactivity to it so that the Dukka of challenge does not lead to the Ducca of suffering when we add Tanha to it. Dukkha, sukkha. So much is summarized in how we practice with dukkha-dukkha, dukkhasukha, sukha-dukkha, and sukhasukh. I hope this was useful to you. Where does the sukkha come from? Marilyn asks, I watch the goldfish in my pond rising to eat the food I give them once or twice a day. You know, they're having some sukkah moment. There are natural bodily pleasures. There's the relief of escape from danger. You know, there's the reassurance of, you know, someone caring about you. These are natural, I think. Those are worldly forms of sukkha, going to my distinctions. Certainly culture and conditioning and biology shape what is pleasurable for someone, not so for others. I have friends who love opera. For me, I think it's incredibly skillful and... I would rather spend the next two hours doing almost anything else. But you know, that's me, I'm a uncultured lout. People like different things. I will say that throughout cultures, what is interesting is that while there's a lot of variation in like the kind of foods people like, different forms, you know sukkha, worldly sukkhas different, profound sukkah tends to be really similar. In its account even across all kinds of cultures. I think because it's extremely deep in us and so there's not so much variation about it. It's like profoundly inherent.

[00:42:23] Okay, I think let's see anything else. You can definitely love your partner without craving. And again, watch out the words here, speaking to Rosanne at 25 minutes past the hour. We can be extremely attached. We can have experiences of attachment that are really strong. And you can also be aware of the subtleties of possessiveness, the refusal to face the ultimate impermanence of the body of your partner and your own. You know, you

can be aware of subtletys. Of tanha that are added to that kind of sukha. And of course, when they die, we grieve. Of course we grieved, loss. Grieving is loving. Of course we grieve and that kind of grieving is just plain dukkha. It's first start dukkhas. It's uncomfortable, it's sorrowful, and it's not a problem at all. For me, what's really interesting, and I'll leave you with this for your own practice, is to explore how to be right in the middle, because everybody here just about, I think everybody, is not a monastic, we're householders. How can we be right in the of eating a really good meal or right in middle of doing something we really care about? While being at a deep place inside. Independent of it as an experience and free in our relationship to it and profoundly undisturbed in the core of our being, profoundly still, profoundly stable in the core of being, even as 99.9 percent of us is really cheering on the Golden State Warriors to make it further in the playoffs. But it's not going to happen. That's a great exploration.