

8_6_25 Talk*

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

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] I hope that meditation was helpful for you. And the simple practice in it is one of establishing a sense of presence and then gently releasing whatever is in the way of what is called in different places the natural state of a mind that is undisturbed or tapping into the depths that are undisturbed. In a mind which does contain some disturbance. That's the natural state. And it's interesting that the natural state is not a big blank. It certainly has qualities of awareness, as well as people report, and I certainly experience, you may have done as well, an innate kind of comfort, acceptance, ease. Peacefulness, there's a lovingness, a warm heartedness, and innate wisdom in the natural state as we settle into it. And that's a lovely thing to observe. It's very reassuring that our natural state has those qualities that are directly, ah, thank you, that are directly observable. And then over time, we deepen there. We deepen in the natural state.

[00:01:35] Here, I'd like to share with you an observation from someone I spoke with today, John McCransky. John, I had never met before. He's a combination of really, really deep teacher and practitioner, as well as a really, really deep scholar. And that's a culmination I particularly appreciate and get a lot from routinely. That kind of person. And John was saying that an approach that he takes has these three aspects to it that have a certain progressiveness to them, although you can move around among them. The first is this receiving or settling into or finding our own true nature, our own natural state of this peacefulness and awareness and contentment. And then deepening, deepening into that way of being. Forcing anything, more like removing or releasing what is obscuring it and what is not yet and what is clouding it or covering it over, releasing it. That's the deepening, second phase.

[00:02:50] First phase, receiving, entering, you could say deepening. And then in the third phase, he calls it including, I might call it recognizing, in which we include others. In the recognition of their natural state as well. Behind whatever personality they might have, much as behind your personality, is this natural state, is your true nature. Behind their personality, deep down is their innate goodness as well, and that third step naturally moves us into compassion and love for other beings, which is kind of an aim of the whole process in some traditions. Taking care of oneself, of course, but also really finding ways into a lovingness and inclusiveness of others through, in this case, a recognition. Like me, like you, like you, like me, same, same. It's really quite profound, isn't it, to go just take it all the way out. So like any progressive process, we take steps in it. Often we begin with a merely conceptual understanding of the landmarks. That's okay, because then we finally take that map and we start moving out into the territory itself that's experiential, that's embodied. Lovely, right? Receiving, deepening, including, as John puts it, and I highly recommend his work, including his most recent book on compassion with Paul Condon.

[00:04:46] I, as I shared, have really been drinking from the fire hose, the Dharma fire hose the last 10 days, two weeks, something, different sources, and I want to explore with you something that has resolved a... A problem I've had, or probably I should say a misunderstanding I've had, related to deep Buddhist teachings. Some things have really clarified for me. So I want to explore this with you in terms of some very very fundamental wisdom teachings in the Buddhist tradition, particularly early Buddhism, and really explore their practical impact. Their experiential impact. So here we go. Master Yunmin, this is a Zen story, lived, I'm not sure, 500, 800 years ago. Someone might get it exactly right in the chat. Master Yunmen, as the story goes, was once asked, what is it that trees wither and

leaves fall? And he replied, body exposed in the golden wind. Now there are undoubtedly some very particular understandings of that story that are located in the Zen tradition or even the specific Zen context of the time. I'm no expert on that. I'm sharing my own sense of this. Here we have the tree, the body, your body, my body, and more broadly, The bodies of others are all conditions, animals, plants, mountains, skies, planets, suns, solar systems. Bodies exposed, thoughts, feelings, desires, images, memories, all kinds of bodies, bodies exposed in the golden wind. And in that sense of the golden win, for me there's the sense of both the gold and the wind.

[00:07:10] And two. To enjoy the gold, the beauty, the love, the nurturance, we must also live exposed to the winds. In Tibetan Buddhism, Shantideva talked about the eight worldly winds, perhaps other Tibetan teachers did too. Praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and ill repute. We are exposed, we live exposed, we must be exposed. There's no way not to be exposed if we are living. And the more fully we live in a way, the larger the scope of our concerns and interests and the wider our values, the more exposed we are actually to the golden winds. So what are those winds actually? And. In terms of a book I mentioned, I mentioned a recent book by John McCransky and Paul Condon. I am blanking on the title. I know the word compassion is in the title and that's the book I mention. Here we have an observation of the Buddha that the winds that we are exposed to, and I'm gonna now adapt, I'm going to connect the teachings of Yunmen with the teachings that the Buddha, you know, 1500 or more years before that, the Buddha said that there are certainly three characteristics. There are more than three characteristics, but there are three key characteristics of all phenomena. And certainly, yeah.

[00:09:03] The first characteristic is impermanence. The Pali word for this, Pali being a key language of early Buddhism, is Anicca, A-N-I-C-C A, Anicca. Impermanence, things change. Many people have observed these three characteristics, not just the Buddha. I believe it was Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, who said, you can never put your finger into the same river twice. The river is constantly changing. Things arise, things pass away.

[00:09:39] The second characteristic of all phenomena is a nata, which is to say emptiness, or the absence of an intrinsic independent essence in anything. In other words, everything is processes in relationships. And this understanding is very apparent in meditation, you know, observing the mind stream, things leading to the next thing coming and going. And this understanding is very consistent with quantum mechanics, the deepest insights in physics, as well as in deep ecology, the web of life, a network of processes in relationships. A very striking way of recognizing this is that our own bodies are what, 70% or so water as well as other things. Most of the molecules in our body, most of the atoms in our bodies will have changed over the course certainly of several years and many of the items and molecules in our body are truly continually changing. We really are processes in relationships and these materials in our own body, any atom bigger than helium in your body or mind. Iron, the calcium, the nitrogen, the oxygen, all of it was born in the heart of an exploding star to drift through our universe to gradually coalesce or collect in a rocky planet like our own.

[00:11:22] And here we are today, as Carl Sagan put it, made of stardust. So things are processes in relationships. There's no way around that. And then third, which is our subject here. D-U-K-K H-A. Now, there are two kinds of Dukkha. In the three characteristics, this is the Dukkha that might be called first dart. In other words, the point here is that we are exposed, much as the body is exposed in the golden wind, we are expose to the fact that stuff falls apart. People are late, the body ages, sometimes people disappoint, there are unpleasant experiences, first characteristic of first dark dukkha,

sometimes things hurt. Sometimes they keep hurting for the rest of your life. There is loss, the heartaches, there is remorse, there is elections don't go the way you like. It rains on your party. Things go wrong, it happens.

[00:12:45] Second is that even when things are great, they change because of the first characteristic of anicca, they change. And the third basis for dukkha is because everything is processes in relationships with no independent eternal essence, therefore no phenomena. Can itself be the basis for permanent happiness? This is true. And I want to slow it down here and really take a moment to just register that in this life. Stuff happens. And when we're startled by the fact that stuff happens, along the three lines I said, sometimes it's unpleasant, even if it's pleasant, it ends, and no single thing can be a permanent source of happiness. Fundamentally, we can't even, we certainly cannot possess any experience. So when we are startled and surprised by that and dismayed by that fact, Well, then we move into. Second Dark Duca, which is suffering, and I'll get to that in a minute.

[00:14:09] But on the other hand, when we recognize the inevitability of crud stuff, we're less dismayed when it happens. We're less rocked by it. We have more equanimity, more inner peace. We're not so unhappy when it happened. We see it. It does not mean that we approve of it. Doesn't mean that like it. We can still pursue the good as we deem it, as best we can. But we recognize that, wow, there's an inherent imperfect ability to life, to the mind, to phenomena. Rust never sleeps. And that sensibility that acknowledges the inherency of first start dukkha, this kind of dukkah, is at odds with the American consumerist culture. It's at odds with the endless promises and the advertising we experience, which is a culture that is spreading more and more widely in the world. In that culture, there's this fantasy that if I only have this, So if I'm only. You know, three pounds lighter. If I only have a brighter smile, you know, if I only had a shinier, you now, partner, yes, then I'll be happy. And this awareness that is squarely centered in Buddhism of three characteristics, you know? Anicca, Anatta, and Dukkha, inherent. Even after enlightenment, there's no escape. From this kind of dukkha.

[00:15:58] The Buddha experienced probably food poisoning toward the end of his life, very painful. He probably experienced a certain amount of back pain. His heart, you know, he was affected by the loss of dear friends. There's no escape, even with enlightenment, from the three characteristics of existence. I could stop here. But happily, the Buddha kept going. And this takes us to the kind of dukkha that's in the first of the four noble truths. There is that dukkah, that suffering, which is caused by the second noble truth of craving, clinging and craving, Attachment, pressure. Drivenness, possessiveness, emotional reactivity, psychologically minded people as. People are these days in the culture, can recognize that something happens and then there's a cascade of reactions to it, often learned and required cascade of actions.

[00:17:22] Then there are reactions to reactions and then other people are reacting to our reactions to our reaction to their reactions. Vicious cycle begins. We're quite familiar with that kind of suffering and that's the common habit and from a neurological biological standpoint quite pointedly we could say that mother nature for 600 million years in the evolution of the nervous system has been very busy and very effective in the foundry, in the manufacturing plant. Of the evolution of increasingly complex creatures, including us, whose nervous systems are the most complex of all. Mother nature has been very busy to make us better and better at craving because that is a short-term solution to conditions in which our ancestors found themselves. Yes. Fight with what's painful or run away from it or freeze in the face of it. Yes, hold on to what's pleasurable. My precious. Yes. Get jealous

and envious and bitter and vengeful in relationships to keep what you want and all the rest of that and fight against those other people and those other bands.

[00:18:57] There's a lot of craving that's hardwired into our machinery. And that kind of craving, when applied to the three characteristics, the golden winds, and in particular to that kind of dukkha, craving applied to dukkha creates suffering. When there is simply dukkha with no craving, there are just conditions. There may be anger, but there's not suffering in the anger. There may be disappointment, there may be enthusiasm, there may be delight, there may be joy. But without craving. There's only that in the natural state. There is no escape. The dukkha in the three characteristics. There is an escape from the suffering that is the dukkha in The Four Noble Truths. And that escape is found in the Eightfold Path in the traditional teachings of the Dharma.

[00:20:13] The Buddha has a phrase that I really like. It's really been helpful for me personally that when we are having experiences that we recognize the gratification in them. The reward value, even the reward value in ruminating about things that are unpleasant. There's some weird kind of reward in it that keeps us going, all right? Recognize the gratification, certainly the gratifications in those pleasures that we get addicted to. Recognize that gratification including the gratification in righteousness, possessiveness, me. Being right, being superior. Being on the inside, keeping them on the outside, recognize the gratifications and the danger. The danger is you see it in your gratifications. What are the dangers? What are dangers in the reinforcing? The dangers in identifying? So that you're glued to it and stuck to it? What are the dangers? What are dangers in conflicts with others? What are dangers in getting sucked into smaller happinesses that crowd out larger ones? What are dangers to your body, your poor sweet body, you know, accumulating allostatic load from the stresses that come from craving, clinging and craving? What are they dangers, right? Recognizing the gratification. Recognizing the dangers and then relating those dangers to getting on your own side being for yourself so that you're not so that you care about those dangers you want to deal with them you want to get away with them get away from them and then third the escape in a good sense what's the escape very often it's to open the hand of contraction and let something go. It's turning a corner. It's not feeding the beast, not feeding the inner troll.

[00:22:41] Sometimes the escape is just being patient and not adding insult to injury, not pouring gasoline on the embers of that fire. Sometimes the escape is insight, or you just realize, well, you be you. How's that working for you? But okay, you be you. Not with a sneer, but with some equanimity. So the gratification, the danger, and the escape. We can say a lot about practicing with different kinds of craving. There's a lot of Dharma about it. The key point is deepening your clarity that, wow, it is possible. To move through life with impermanence and emptiness and things occur emptily. The dynamism, that complexity, the interdependence of everything. It is possible to move through that and the impermanence in all that and to face the discomforts sometimes, the losses sometimes that are part of life. It is possible to be exposed. To the golden winds without suffering, without adding suffering to pain. That's the liberating opportunity. So how do we do it? I see when I look at practice that there are two main paths that are summarized in a traditional metaphor that the path of practice has two kind of tracks.

[00:24:41] So we might imagine the wagon of awakening has two wheels following these two tracks. One is the track of gradual development and that is a track that is very foregrounded in early Buddhism and definitely foregrounded. In much clinical psychology. We make efforts, we cultivate, we train, we develop. There's an inherent goal-directedness in it, which is okay. We seek to develop that which is wholesome. We make wise effort,

which is in the Noble Eightfold Path. This is very Buddhist, which is to say, from the Buddha, the path of gradual development. We change, and those changes are marked by gradual observable increasingly, changes in your own brain. New structures are developing and parts of the circuitry of the underlie strengths that you're acquiring, like greater control over attention or greater emotional regulation or a deepening sense of your own body and your own depths of emotion and sensation, all regulation and interoceptive awareness. Are indicated then in long-term meditators, the neural circuitry that's involved in that is measurably thicker and bigger in various ways. Great, okay, the path of development.

[00:26:09] Then there is also, it's rather implicit in early Buddhism and gets very explicit in the Mahayana developments, roughly 400 or more years after the Buddha passed away, in which there's an orientation increasingly to the natural state toward innate goodness, innate lovingness, innate bodhicitta, innate Buddha nature. Inherently radiant awareness, true nature already. And then practice becomes more about removing the obscurations, removing the coverings, the hindrances, whose traditional meaning is coverings over, that which covers or obscures or hinders the experiencing and the expressing of that which is already beautiful within us. So then practice in that second track, that second wheel is about a falling back into and opening into, a believing in, not out of dogmatic righteousness, but out of informed confidence. Yes, indeed, underneath it all is something really beautiful.

[00:27:37] A version of that was really highlighted in a conversation that Forrest and I had on our podcast just a couple of days ago with Mingyur Rinpoche, Mingyure Rinpochee, whose amazing book, *In Love with the World*, is about his own roughly several years of just wandering. He walked away from his very official and, I won't say privilege, but I would say, of a nice, nice situation he was in. He just walked away and became a wandering beggar in northern India, maybe edging into Nepal as well and beyond. Anyway, and so we had a chance to speak with him. I highly recommend his book. I really recommend his recent focus on meditation. I think it's anywhere every day meditation, something like that. The epilog to his book *I'm in love with the world* is just a jewel. I was asking him or he was saying the three characteristics in his view in his Tibetan tradition in which he's a part of a larger tradition in Tibet or in Tibetan culture. He said the three characteristic of true nature are awareness and he said kind of to love, and then he said wisdom. And his examples of awareness and wisdom were really clear. Like, oh, okay, that can be what's really going on way down deep, you know, or deep inside, right? Inherently, innately in you. But the way he was describing love was basically, it sounded like one reaction after another. You know, something's pleasant, you chase it, you know get it, you pick something else, you want to, you try to develop along the way. And I was like, I said, Rinpoche, I'm sorry. I'm a little confused here. It seems I get the awareness and the wisdom aspects, but you seem to be describing just what to me as a clinical psychologist is like one neurotic event after another in the mind stream. And there's a lot of focus on practicing with that and certainly early Buddhism and clinical psychology, but that doesn't sound so much like innate goodness. Where's the innate lovingness, the innate goodness and all that? He said, in all of that is a longing for what is good. In all of our neuroses, in all of our cascades of craving is a longing for what truly deeply good. And we could not long for it if we did not already have a sense of what it is from what is already present. Deep down inside each one of us. Wow, thank you Rinpoche. In the middle, I'm gonna use some blunt language here. In the metal of my own bullshit, yes, is a longing for true happiness. And that longing is love. That longing is loving. Longing is loving, we love that which is good, so we long for it. Beautiful.

[00:31:13] So we have these two general approaches and still notwithstanding the ways in which the second approach that falls back into and surrenders into that which is already innately good within you right here, right now, it is still present in some early Buddhism. So here I would like to share with you another. Gem of a book, Buddha Dhamma, and this book was recommended to me from. Monks, young monks, who are becoming friends, Ajahn Kovilow and I think Ajahn, sorry, Tussabot, I'm getting it wrong, Tusabot at Clear, I think it's Clear Mountain monastery up in Seattle area. Please, please somebody help me here, you know, with where they're from. Anyway, it's a fantastic book, really recommend it. It goes through early Buddhism in a very clear and Impactful way, so I recommend it. Anyway, I want to read from it some of the descriptions of sukkha.

[00:32:30] So now we're on to sukkah, which is contrasted to Dukkha sukkh The root of the word for sukkuh. Well sukkoh and Sanskrit It's very close to the root of words for sucrose and sugar. There's a sweetness There's the sweetness to it. And there are two kinds of Sukha. So in the teachings, there is the kind of Sukh that we chase after with craving. And what Sukha plus Tanha, craving, equals second dart dukkha. I'll just let that go right by. The point is, if we're really attached to our team winning, that we want that sukkha we want the pleasure of our team winning we want that gratification we're gonna suffer the second dart kind of dukkha is gonna come forward we're going to suffer we're going to be disappointed if like I'm in an interaction with my wife a little earlier today and there are these turning points where there's first there's dukkah there's the first art dukkhah like she's saying that's kind are challenging to me and a little critical. But I don't yet have to get reactive to it. There's enough choice there.

[00:33:50] And then we can navigate that and I don't t yet tip into irritation and reactions. In that situation you know I could recognize the gratification and the danger in pushing my point with her so I moved into the escape so there is the pleasure there are pleasures you know there are pleasures in this life but if our relationship to them and this is the key point the Buddha is laying out these three characteristics hey folks guess what you'll never get away from impermanence I'm adapting the Buddha, hopefully not giving offense. I imagine Jack Nicholson playing the Buddha here. People, you'll never get away from impermanence. People, you'll ever get away from the fact that everything is connected to everything else. Nothing exists on its own. Face it and you'll never get away. Dukkha in the sense that sometimes shit happens and all the great stuff, including everyone you love, everything you like, everything you'd like about your own body, eventually because of impermanence. Oh, it's going to go away. Guess what? No escape. And last, because everything has the nature of emptiness. It exists. Emptily. It means it's existing, but you can't hold on to it. You can't claim it for your own. In fact, that sense of self of me that seems so precious to you is empty as well. Whoa, people, there's no escape from those three characteristics of existence, right? The Buddha's telling us all that. There is that second kind of sukkha, which is innate. And that's what we were exploring in the meditation, where when the mind is undisturbed, this relates to the material I have about the green zone that's very biological. It goes to the title of Robert Sapolsky's book, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, or a teaching of a teacher of mine at a time, Adi Da, Lavananda. Who said the eating gorilla comes in peace. I think that's another title of another book on food and diet, point being when our needs are met enough in the moment and that experience is deep within us, the body mind naturally settles into its resting state, its undisturbed state. And depending on their complexity and their nature, animals including us default to in what is fundamentally a state of peacefulness, contentment and love. When our needs respectively for safety, satisfaction, and connection feel like they're being fully met. All right, that's the natural state.

[00:37:03] So here in this lovely book, I wanna read a little piece to you. I wanna read a series of characteristics of the second kind of sukka. So... The second kind of sukka, which is available to us, is the result of a mental condition, broadly, that is clear, free from difficulties and obstacles and limitations of thought. The first kind of sukka is an attempt to fill a lack or a feeling of deficiency. Something is missing, something is wrong, and then craving arises. Animals crave when something is missing and something is raw, right? It's a deficit state. If you recall or know about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, The lower four needs are called D needs. D for deficiency. Something is missing. There's a deficiency of survival-related resources. There's the deficiency of connection. There's deficiency of status, other kinds of, there's a efficiency of power, let's say. And then self-actualization is called a being need in which there's not a deficit. Nothing is missing, nothing is wrong. And there's a natural expression of our capabilities and our hearts, you know, callings. This is the second kind of Sukha.

[00:38:50] The second kind of Sukh is a happiness that does not depend on external causes to fulfill desires. There is a place for doing things to put gas in your car or pay your bills or eat a chocolate chip cookie or make love or dance in the moonlight, yelling at the moon. There's a place for that. There's place for writing a book, building a house, planting a tree, preserving democracy. There's that place for absolutely. The question always is what's our relationship to it. When I was doing my rant in the voice of Jack Nicholson, substitute your favorite. Whatever. The point is the Buddha is saying these things are inescapable. What is our relationship to them? What is your relationship to Anicca, Anatta, and Dukkha? You know, impermanence, emptiness, and that Dukka that's in the first arts of life. What's our relationship to them, right? So we can pursue wholesome things. I'm going to watch some television later. I'm gonna take out the garbage cans. I'm going to actually eat my dinner. I'm to hug my wife. I'm go to tell her I love her before we go to bed. I'm in a listen when she tells me she loves me too. That's all right. What's our relationship? And can we recognize the danger in the craving? That is applied to the gratification. Gratification is okay. It's when craving is applied to it that we suffer and harm ourselves and others. So to continue here, I'm gonna read this again. The second kind of Sukha is a happiness that does not depend on external causes to fulfill desires. It doesn't depend on them. This sukka is a mental condition that allows the mind to be itself, its resting state, its equilibrium in the deepest sense, its natural condition. With nothing disturbing it, undisturbed. You know, I use words sometimes. A lot of Buddhism is described through negation, like deathless or unconditioned. And I think sometimes, I've practiced sometimes just feeling into words that might arise for you, like, like undisturb. Uncomplicated, unbound. Unblemished. Unconditioned. Undisturbed.

[00:42:04] So here we go. This condition that gives rise to the second kind of Sukha, that in some sense is the second kinda Sukha. This condition can be described in the following ways. It is clean because there is nothing present to stir it up and muddy it. It is bright. And think of these as words to draw us home as we finish here. Feeling letting them land in you and feeling a response to these words and even a sensing into Yeah This is home for me. This is that home which has always been there Even if I have felt homeless sometimes Even if others have driven me from this home This home is indestructible It's always here a home that is clean and bright because it has wisdom that sees things as they really are, far and wide, bright. Peaceful because there is no agitation in the innateness of mind. There is only relaxation and calm. It is independent in this depth of being. You are independent because you're free. There are no limitations placed on thoughts. Your mind is light, wide open to expressing love, good intentions and kindness. It is complete because there is no feeling of lack or deficiency or loneliness. Only freshness and openness. And we're not getting there. We may be uncovering, Gina, what is already. It's

when that which is sought is already present. When we are the change we seek, as some people would put it. Other qualities to finish of freedom. You're not enslaved by your own machinery. There is wisdom.

[00:44:34] And so to finish here, I'm really inviting you in to both wheels, both tracks of the Wagon of Awakening. Certainly the path of gradual development. Reduces the machinery of craving, deconditions us from craving, including the ways that, understandably, this is Mother Nature's plan, let's be clear, to crave, to manage terrible conditions. And we get conditioned to crave with a nervous system that's designed, that's inclined to crave. So it can take time, through therapy, through practice, through... Zoloft through whatever, to gradually, gradually, gradually clear away and gradually pursue our path of development. And meanwhile, it's such a refuge and such a light already within to recognize your true nature already, including the happiness in it, that peaceful happiness, that peaceful, open-hearted happiness. That is a guide and a signpost for what is already good within you. As we settle into that second kind of sukha, we can also recognize, as John McCransky put it, those qualities in others. That leads into a compassion for the ways that those qualities may be covered over in others or pushed away through conflicts of various kinds. And also is a way of recognizing or acknowledging a very profound depth to our common humanity that just like you, that person over there underneath it all is innately beautiful. Wakeful, loving, peaceful, and wise, just like you.