

Final Dharmette and Closing

Uncontrived Online Weekend Retreat

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So, freedom. What? Freedom? I'm not free. My mind's been crazy for the last two days. But something should be said about nibbana, which is the, it's really very simple, actually, the absence of greed, the absence of hatred, and the absence of delusion. Those are not there. Then that is what the Buddha was pointing toward. He says this again and again in the suttas. I'm not just picking one obscure reference all over the teachings when he doesn't often define nibbana, but when he does, he defines it as an absence. And sometimes this isn't very inspiring. People say Theravada Buddhism has this kind of downer side because it's mostly about letting go. But I found this lovely quote from Jack Hornfield's book, "The Wise Heart." He's talking about Jack Hornfield's teacher, Deepa Ma. He says, "When Harvard psychologist Jack Engler was doing his research with my teacher, Deepa Ma, he asked her about one of the common misunderstandings of Buddhist teachings. This all sounds very gray," he said, "getting rid of greed, getting rid of hate, getting rid of ignorance. Where's the juice? Oh, you don't understand, Deepa Ma, burst out laughing. There's so much sameness in ordinary life. We are always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. Once greed, hatred, and delusion are gone, you see everything fresh and new all the time. Every moment is new. Life was dull before. Now, every day, every moment is full of taste and zest." So that was her experience of freedom. I find it quite inspiring. But of course, then there's a question, well, how to get there? And you know, it's a process. Of course, it's about letting go, but we can't will letting go exactly. Instead, we have to gently and lovingly unfold the heart over time. It's an unfolding process, a disentangling, essentially. And there are really three dimensions that we do that through those are the dimensions of Sela, Samadhi, and Panya. We have heard of those so, Sela is ethical conduct, and it consists of the steps of the path of why speech, why is action, why is livelihood. So we get our life together in some way. Now, these are largely relational qualities. So they're how we connect with other people, how we are, how our presence is, and our approach to life, essentially. Livelihood isn't just how you make a living. Livelihood is how you live your life. How is it that your lifestyle is supporting your practice? And that looks different for different people. There isn't just one way. Of course, we wouldn't know. There are livelihoods that are definitely not going to be supportive. But then there's a wide range of stuff that is. And it's a very interesting practice to consider month by month,

year by year, is the way that I'm living in a broad sense, supportive for my practice. And then Samadhi. So Samadhi is steps of the path related to effort, mindfulness, and concentration. And basically the development of the mind and the heart. There's an understanding that the ethics are the foundation, but only that will not be quite sufficient for complete freedom. It's very good. Please do as much as possible. But the Buddha said also that we need to do some kind of mental cultivation. So living mindfully is a great start. And then also trying to aim our mind in the direction of wholesome mind states. We see that the suffering is partly in the world, partly in our actions, partly in our life. But we know people who have very good life conditions, but they're unhappy. And so what's going on in there? Well, there's also an internal dimension that we can work with. Of course, we also may know people who are in very difficult circumstances, but are somehow doing okay with it, or somehow rising to meet it in surprising ways. So what's the difference there? They have some mental quality, some mental ability. So we move our mind more toward states of awareness, states of peace, states of care, states of meta, all the factors of awakening that we can work with joy, investigation, equanimity. So these kinds of qualities and moving our mind away from when it gets caught in anger, greed, envy, fear, the things that drag us down in certain ways. So Samadhi is about the sorting out of these mind states and the favoring, the taking root of the ones that are more helpful for our path. And meditation is a really key part of that, as we saw over the last two days, you may feel that now that your mind is in a different state, just from having put a lot of energy into the practice for a couple of days. And, you know, that will persist to some degree, or it's going to change because we can't hang on to anything. But over time, more and more practice, meditation, even moments of mindfulness throughout the day, gradually recondition the heart to more often move in the direction of peace, of ease, of walking path. It's all good. It's all good. And then there's there's panya, wisdom, and in some ways, we start the path with some of that, because those are actually the first two steps of the path, right, view and right intention. But they're also the fruit of Samadhi, the path is a loop. You haven't seen that in your practice yet, you will, you'll go around many loops. So panya is where we start some sense of this is going to be a good idea, basic sense of maybe there's another way to live my life besides running around, very agitated, getting into difficulties and, you know, things start saying maybe maybe there will be some other approach. So that's the initial wisdom, then we start acting in ways that are a little bit more coherent, start training the mind. And then we have another layer of wisdom we see into permanence. Wow, things really are changing. It gets me in touch with what's really important, you know, life isn't lasting, it seems to be going by faster and faster the older I get. And there's going to come to some end, am I living the life I want to live? And, you know, am I centering the values that I now see are important to me? Insight into tukka, insight into the really the unsatisfactoriness of the usual way of doing things is a hard lesson because our parents, our society, our friends, our culture, everything pointed us toward a certain kind of life, you know, achieve and get an education

of some kind or some vocational training, get a job, maybe if you're lucky you can get a house, have children, have a pet, you know, and we can start to wonder, was that it? Even if you get all of that, the Buddha had all of that and he kept thinking, isn't there something more? This doesn't seem to quite be it. And so it's hard to face up sometimes to, yeah, all the stuff that we've put a lot of energy into isn't going to ultimately do it for us. Don't worry, we have to do something as a human and all those things are fine and we can do all those things, but if we do it with a wise way of looking at them, it will be much more beneficial, more satisfying, and we can then move toward the deepest satisfaction, which is to let go of the clinging to that. That's what the Buddha pointed us toward, the understanding that our small sense of self is a big problem, actually. This project we've been working on to create our whole life, oh no, clinging to it is difficult, but this is an unfolding of understanding and as we have the next layer of wisdom, say we understand, oh, I want to align more with my values, that then points us to the next phase of what ethical conduct, our behavior, how are we going to have to change our life to live what we now understand? Did you learn something on this retreat that might shift how we want to be in the world? Yeah, sometimes I want people to work on just the simple understanding, if it were really about our baseline, which is get what's pleasant, avoid what's unpleasant, try to keep the stuff that's good, and try to be somebody. Has that worked yet? How many decades have we tried? Has that worked yet? And we could only say, well, I didn't quite achieve it yet. The next one, the next thing, when I finally get that, that's going to be enough. Now, if that were the way it would have worked already, and enough people would have done it, that there was kind of a sense that that's really true, but no, it doesn't quite work that way, so we might need to try something else. And all of you are already doing it in a sense, having found the Dharma, having found the path, having gotten yourself to the point of being able to do a couple days of retreat, that's actually not so easy, especially organizing your lay life around it. You didn't come to a retreat center where all that was kind of taken care of for you, you're just stuck there. No, you created it. It's great. Really great. So I would say that maybe the place to start, the thing that kind of underlies this process of Siva, Samadhi, and Panya is a value that we can discover on retreat and carry through our life, if we're mindful about it, which is the value of simplicity. And I want to read the opening verses of the Mettusuta, Sutra on Good Will. Many people kind of skip over this. They know the part about sending Good Will to creatures large and small, near and far, all kinds of beings born and to be born, but consider just these opening lines. This is what should be done by one who is skilled and goodness and who knows the path of peace. Let them be able and upright, straightforward and gentle and speech, humble and not conceited, contented and easily satisfied, unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways, peaceful and calm and wise and skillful, not proud and demanding in nature. This is about simplicity. You can almost feel the ease of hearing that. Not that we always do that, but there's simplicity of body, able and upright, just straightforward, peaceful, calm. So we can

imagine, you know, what does simplicity of body mean? It doesn't mean that you always move in a slow, meditative way. You can play with children, run around with your dog. That's fine, but a certain kind of presence with our body. And we can see that in people. Sometimes my teacher talks about when he first moved into a Zen community, looking out across the courtyard and he just looking out his window basically and he saw the cook, you know, walking across the courtyard, going to the kitchen to start cooking for the day. And something about, you know, he was just really present. He just walked across the courtyard. He wasn't going slowly, he wasn't doing mindful walking, meditation. There was something about just his simple, direct purposefulness, ease in his body. He was relaxed, he was joyful. And he thought, "Oh, that's the way to be. That's the way to walk through the world." So something like that. Simplicity of speech, literally says straightforward and gentle in speech. We also have not proud and demanding in nature. So can our speech be simple, direct? Say what we mean, mean what we say in some ways. You know, when that's the skillful way to communicate. And not so much complaining, demanding these kinds of things. I've worked with people who took on the practice of refraining from complaining for a period of a few weeks. And they said it was such an amazing, revealing practice. I know a lot of people do it when they know that they complain a lot. And so then it's, you know, very clear. But I've also had people try it thinking, "Oh, this is going to be such a breeze because I never complain." And then, you know, I'm not a complaining type. And then they say, "Oh, my gosh, you know, after three weeks of watching this, I had no idea how much I complained actually." So, you know, it's very revealing to take on these very simple practices for me to hear. And then simplicity of mind. Now, that's an interesting one. You know, we have in this one, humble and not conceited. So we're not spending a lot of time thinking about ourselves, peaceful, calm, wise, seeing things in wise ways, etc. And we, you know, being simple in mind doesn't mean that you don't think anymore. I know some of us have jobs where we need to think. That's a lot of what it's about. Or, you know, we have to, of course, we have to organize our life. You still have to remember what you need to buy at the store. And it's fine to have enjoyable, deep philosophical conversations with people. No problem. That's not what simplicity of mind refers to. It refers to letting go of the unnecessary parts of thinking that we do. So much of that, how much of our day spent ruminating about the past or speculating about the personalities and motives of other people or staring at the calendar, thinking about things that are upcoming. So, you know, things like this. So we can have a simpler approach to our mind and just do things straightforwardly when it's time to have a conversation about philosophy. Great. When it's time to not do that anymore and we're taking a shower, can we just take a shower and not spend all that time ruminating about something or other. So, you know, freeing up the mental resources to do more practice, then we will be so tired in our sit at the end of the day. It also mentions this phrase unburdened with duties. So I like to mention that one because there's two ways to read it. You know, of course, we can be literally

unburdened with duties. We could do less. You know, a lot of our duties and doings and etc. Things we take on are things because we want to feel busy. We want to feel important. We want to be doing things, getting things done and all of that that goes with that. Would it be okay to have a kind of an open schedule for the afternoon? Not really have much to do, not be needed for a few hours. That can be a real practice for some. So it might be that if you look at your life and you think, simplicity would help my practice, maybe you could do a little bit less. But unburdened with duties also means that maybe we would have duties but not be burdened. There are always going to be duties as a human. This is a doing kind of life to keep things up and we have relations and so forth. But can we do it without being burdened by those duties? Probably we can again think of somebody that we know who has a lot of stuff going on. You know, they are busy with many different things, but they're not burdened by it. They're always present for what they're doing. They're able to kind of handle and manage it all and it seems okay for them. They don't seem overly stressed. Maybe we know someone like that. And on the other side, we may know somebody who has relatively little going on. They're incredibly burdened. The whole thing is hard and difficult and there's a lot coming from the mind making it difficult. I know I have felt burdened by my duties and sometimes I remember that line and I realize, "Well, if I just did this without resistance, I'd be done with it in 10 minutes. But if I resisted and procrastinate and hesitate, it's going to take me three hours." But you know, so working with our minds, to work with our mind around these things. So I suggest that as a way going forward, a way coming out of this retreat, I need about 20 different things. Don't make that complicated. Just pick a few areas that we might simplify in body and speech, in mind. So these are my thoughts on the fruits of Shavita and Vipassana. Seeing some kind of simplicity in our life and daring to live it. So are there further questions? Is there another chance for anything that's come up? Alicia. Thank you for everything, Kim. I just wanted to ask, you brought up a lot of Suthas and they were wonderful. I've been looking into Suthas at Access to Insight, I believe, website. Some of the stories and Suthas. So would you recommend or encourage us to read up any Suthas and that would be beneficial or just supplemental to our practice? Oh, sure. Yeah, so Access to Insight is a nice place to find Suthas. Also, Suthacentral.net is another good one that actually has the whole follow canon on it and a number of different translations. So both of those are good. I do recommend reading the texts if you're interested in them. I'm not sure that I have a general place that a person can start. Have you read any of the texts before? Do you have any familiar? Not the Suthas, but just in reading. Just, you know, books from what this teacher, I just got one from Aya Kema, this one. Nobody going nowhere. So I just started reading it. So just books like this, but not Suthas specifically. Oh, not Suthas. Okay. I thought you were asking for Suthas. I misunderstood. No, sorry. I did ask for Suthas. Oh, you did ask for Suthas. Okay. But you've been reading other things. Yeah, you haven't been reading Suthas per se. So you're saying, okay. So I do offer a weekly Suthas study class for those who have

the space. It's at an awkward time of day. It's at 11 to noon Pacific. So people with that can be hard. But if you want to start with something that's relatively approachable, there are some verses called the Dhammapada. That's often that's probably the most read Buddhist texts ever, the Dhammapada. Or if you want to start with actual texts, including some of the ones that I voted from, you know, that are more pros, Majma Nikaya is good. I'll put these in the chat. That's the middle one, this course is Buddha. Also, I guess there's a Suthas study class through the Sati Center that Gil and Diana Clark bronzed on Diana Clark do. I think it's at like 330 on Thursdays, not every week, but certain weeks, and they're going through the launching. They might be almost done. And then I think the Samuta is coming maybe in the fall. I'm not sure when, time later. So there are a couple of there are few kind of weekly Suthas study options if you want to do a big group. And those two would be good ones just to invest in any way to have in your collection. Is that good enough to get started? Yes, I think so. Yeah, thank you. Cool. Oh, also, I'll just mention one more thing in terms of courses. If you're not familiar with the Pali Canon, I'll be co-teaching, of course, through Barry Center for Buddhist Studies in August with a few co-teachers where we're going to do just an overview of like, what is the Pali Canon? What are the texts of it? How do you look things up if I give you a reference, you know, like SN 43.5? How do you get there? You know, things like that. So that'll be, I don't know if it's on their website yet, but it's for Thursdays in August and at the Barry Center for Buddhist Studies, PCVS, which is BuddhistInquiry.org, I believe. So that's kind of the overview of the Pali Canon. We've done that one through the Sati Center before. So if you actually like listening to recordings, you can just listen to one of the recorded ones. But if you want to do the class live, it'll be this August. Yeah, I'm a big fan of using the, not all teachers talk about this, but using the texts as a support for practice. I don't think they have to be just intellectual if one really engages them and I encourage that a lot. So I'm delighted with your question, in other words. Donna, your hand is on. Yes. I was just wondering, this may be a strange question, but it kind of went along with what we were doing. So I was reading along with our retreat, The Noble Eightfold Pathbook by Bhikkhu Bodhi that we did a few years back. And in the concentration chapter, he was talking about the original object of concentration, the preliminary sign, which was our breath. And then he went on to the learning sign, which as you mentioned, could be the air currents moving around our nostrils. And then he talks about a counterpart sign. And that was where I just wondered if that's something you can describe or, I mean, I guess he talks about the five absorption factors suppressing the five hindrances at that point. So I guess we would notice that if we ever reach that stage. But that counterpart sign, is that something you can describe or is it too difficult to describe? Okay. So first of all, that system is what's in commentaries, the Vasude Mauga, well, the commentaries. So it's a little different. You won't find those terms like learning sign and counterpart sign in the suttas. But Bhikkhu Bodhi was earlier in his practice, he was much more focused on the texts and the commentaries together. He

always kind of included both of them. And so he had a more, that's a very traditional Theravadan view is to use these particular interpretations of the suttas that are talked about later. So the counterpart sign is usually a light. It's a purely mental object. It appears when the mind starts getting concentrated. Some of you might have seen it. It's actually a natural occurrence is that when the mind starts to get concentrated, we see a light. Sometimes it's colored. Sometimes it's white. Sometimes it's fuzzy or big or small. And this was taken on. In the suttas, you don't do much with it. And that's how I would teach is that if the light appears, it's like, great, that's a sign you're getting concentrated, stay with the breath. Oh, no, it's a, it's something that's coming, just coming in. But there is a whole system of meditation where you use that as a meditation object and you transfer your attention to that as a purely mental sign. You stabilize it in certain ways and then you can immerse into it. And that would be Jhana is when you immerse into the counterpart sign. That's what power oxide teaches. So it's still around. You can get education in this. You can get go on retreats where they do that. That's one of the definitions of Jhana. I talked about that in the, we had that lovely question in the Q&A session. And I said, remember, different teachers are going to say different things are our Jhana or our Jhana. So I talked to Audrey to ask that question about a different kind of Jhana more where one that what doesn't use a light essentially. So, you know, different things, different strokes for different folks, depends how things are arising in your meditation. You'll want to find a teacher that feels whose med system and method feels compatible with how it seems to be arising for you. Does that help? Yeah, that's great. Thank you. Okay. Yeah. Many people have the experience of the light. I've seen it also. I don't follow that particular method, but there is a whole method around using that, using the light. What did you say the method was called again? The teacher, I don't think there's a name for the method, per se. It's a traditional, it's Theravadan meditation from the Visuddhimaga. That's a text, a later text. I'll put that one in the Visuddhimaga. That's a commentarial text from, it's the about the fifth century CE, so much later than Buddha was teaching, later than Pali Khenan. It means the path of purification. And there are teachers who teach that, modern teachers who teach that even now in our CE. Okay, great. Okay. So thank you, everyone, for these beautiful words that you've spoken and for your beautiful practice and we'll bring the retreat to a close with a dedication of the merit of our practice together. There's been a lot of goodness through what we've done and we can take this out and into the world. All things arise and pass. This retreat is passing and the next thing will come. Now we've done something very beautiful with the last two days and that will carry forward and ripple out in ways that we can't even know. So maybe that the people that we live with, if we do feel the immediate benefit of our Shon Lita and Vipassana practice or openness of heart and the people that we might encounter at stores or out on the street if we go for a walk. The people we're going to send email to later. Just the first contacts that we have, may they benefit also from the good effort we've put into cultivating the heart. And then going forward, who knows how far this can go. May it reach

out in concentric circles to touch many beings in many planes, seen and unseen, so that in some way all beings may move toward happiness and peace. May all beings find the deepest freedom, maybe so. All right, off we go. Thank you everyone.