

Transcript: Views, Karma, Judgment

Tahn Pamutto:

The starting point is view. Yeah. So at the very least, if you're going to do something stupid, at least be reminding yourself while you're doing it, this is stupid. It sounds like a small thing and it sounds counterintuitive, but it's actually very huge.

The last thing you want to do is say, "...well, it seems I'm going to do it, so I should try to find a way that it's wholesome." Just don't do that. Just the whole time you're doing, say, "Yeah, this is not good. Yeah, I'm doing this out of craving, this is unwholesome. It'd be better if I saw some way out of it ...but I don't. It seems I'm still doing it, but I'm going to regret it in the morning." It's actually a way better state of affairs, because then you're continuing to build that knowledge of the four noble truths. And when you inevitably suffer, it won't be a surprise. You're like, "There it is! I called it."

And this is what's kind of backwards about the way that the world sees things. In most terms, the world puts emphasis on results, so it's more about the thing you do rather than the intention. The Buddhist teaching shows you that the mind precedes everything, so the intention is the most important thing.

If your intention is not to pretend that it's a good thing or not to enjoy it, if you're actually going, "Yeah, it seems that this is a bad habit," then you know. You don't have the intention to enjoy it or to gloss over.

There's a correlation for stream enterers. It is said that they can't intentionally hide a fault. They acknowledge it as a fault. They try to make amends and they vow to do better in the future. And it might seem like a little thing, like, "wait, they're still messing up." Yes, they're messing up all the time, everywhere, throughout every aspect of their life.

You read it throughout the Vinaya. They're a complete and utter mess. Some of them are still alcoholics, some of them are involved in all sorts of shenanigans. It's just filled with monastics who have some level of attainment, who are still screwing up, but the thing they can't do is say, "Well, that was a good idea. It just didn't turn out right." No, they say, "That was a bad idea, and I'm sorry I did it," and they may still continue to do it. But this is the understanding of a stream enterer. And the understanding of an enlightened being is there is nothing worse than a lie. And if something is unwholesome, you know it's unwholesome.

You never want to tell yourself that it's actually for your benefit or it's actually pleasurable, or it's actually the right thing to do. You just keep telling yourself, no, that wasn't the right thing to do, and you'll be right. That's the thing you get to. That's what it means, right view. You get to be right the whole time.

"That was a bad idea. I said it was a bad idea. I feel bad about it." And yeah, this is the power of honesty and right view. It makes even your bad habits generate motivation towards enlightenment.

Mental kamma, vocal kamma, physical action. And yeah, if you keep telling yourself, this is good, this is good, you may eventually tell other people, this is good. And if it's something that's bad, then that's particularly bad kamma.

It's worse kamma to be lying to yourself, but it's also very bad kamma to be talking other people into doing something bad. And it can really sting before you really get a handle on the suffering of a particular activity. And you find yourself talking with people like, "Oh, yeah, it's so great. Oh, you should really get into it." And afterwards, you might start to move away from it.

You'd be like, "Wait, that really wasn't so good. That really wasn't beneficial." But you have all of this kamma. You have talked the other person into it. And even as you move away and you're like, "That's really not good for me. It's not good for anyone."

You've made all that kamma of talking the other person into it. And if they are now trapped in that particular bad habit, you can't get them out. They have their own kamma and their own path, and so you're trapped by that. You talk them into something that wasn't for their benefit.

So you have to just watch them as they go through that horrible cycle on their own and maybe never get out of it. These are the dangers that we see where cultivating wrong view can lead to wrong speech. Giving people bad advice and pointing them in the wrong direction. When you look over the amount of time and the amount of suffering that's generated, that's way more suffering than just you doing it yourself. Because when you're doing something bad yourself, once you stop, the suffering stops.

But if you talk somebody into doing something, then they continue to do it. Then you're responsible as they continue to do it, and there's nothing you can do about it. So there's so much more suffering as time goes on.

People who practice cultivate the antidotes to a lot of these behaviors and views.

Guilt is something that's very, very much built into the Western mind. "I should feel terrible about doing that bad thing." But when you look at it, it's a not-profitable state based on the idea that you're bad. You've sinned, and therefore you're bad. Guilt doesn't accomplish anything. The kamma is bad, but there's no person who is bad. The person is changing all the time. So the antidote is what's called conscience. (*Hiri* and *Ottappa*...two guardians of the world: Conscience and Moral Dread)

And these two have a lot of the same functions. They recognize a fault, they acknowledge it. They see its unwholesome nature. They try to prevent it from arising in the future. But it doesn't feel good. When your conscience is activated, it's an unpleasant state most of the time, and yet it's a highly profitable one. Likewise, you have traits like humility or being humble. I don't mean being self deprecating, like saying, "Oh, I'm just no good at that, or, I'm such a mess." But being honest, like, "Yeah, I still got a lot of faults. My meditation, it's kind of wishy-washy." Or "I'm trying to do the precepts. I'm kind of keeping the precepts. I'm maybe at five and a half right now."

And you might think, "Oh, no, no. I should be like, Rah-Rah! Buddha, Buddha! We're doing it! We're doing it!" But actually, the humility is very honest. It might not always be pleasant to be honest. It might not always be pleasant to acknowledge the places where you're not quite doing it.

But when you meet longtime practitioners, that's what you tend to take away. They're easy to overlook because they're not big-headed, actually. They can clearly see how many defilements are still in their

mind, they're keeping a very good accounting of them. And so they'll never say, "I'm free of defilements. I'm doing great," unless they totally are.

I have known a couple of monks who say, "Yes. My work is done. If you have any questions, I'll answer them. But if you don't, fine. We'll just sit here quietly.

And it's not always easy, but it's a very profitable state. It completely erodes any ego, any pretense, any tendency to shy away from the reality. The more you acknowledge the reality, the closer you get to figuring out how to work with it.

Judgement, why do we do it? I don't know. We grow up in a culture where it's the normal thing to do.

It's like that joke. It's kind of a joke. I guess you'd call it a story, of the Dalai Lama and a westerner. The westerner asks him, "What do you do about self hate?" And the translator can't get the point across to the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama is going back and forth. The translator is like, "What are you talking about?" Finally the translator says, "Well, this person hates themselves. They find themselves judging themselves."

And the Dalai Lama, his face goes pale and he's like, "Oh, don't do that. Oh, no, no. That's so awful. Don't do that."

This is one thing that we get to acknowledge, that it's not always self judgment. Judgment is a thing... and it doesn't matter if you're doing it to others or you're doing it to yourself. It's the exact same thing. It's just taking a different object. Some of it is rooted in identity view. like the belief "That is a bad person" or "I am a bad person." And then there are deeper levels. Like "They're slipping. They're lazy. They're not good enough."

All of these little judgments we have. Those all have to be dissolved eventually.

The quick track is that every time you catch yourself doing it, thinking, "No, judgments are not good." You start with view. Like, "That doesn't help anybody. It doesn't matter if it sounds right, it's wrong. Just don't do it."

Just like the Dalai Lama said. "No, no, no, don't do that."

The setting into which you're born is not inherently unwholesome. There will be good things that you can pick up from your culture and bad things that you can pick up from your culture. And that tends to be a mix, but it's also based on your own kamma. If you're not terribly wise, then you tend to pick up just everything at random. If you do have some wisdom, then you see those things that are good and you incline towards picking those up as much as you can. And you try to steer yourself away from the things that are not good to pick up. So, judging becomes quite pernicious, like a sneaky little fault that we find in our minds, but it does create a lot of motivation.

So you see a lot of Westerners working really hard to try to figure out why they're suffering so much. Part of that is born from the fact that they're really focused on their suffering.

They don't just get that their community or their family group are good and think everything is good. They're always looking at their individual circumstances and there's always suffering. When you've got a human being, you've got suffering. And so they're like, something's wrong. I need to fix something.

Yeah, that can be a great way to spot delusion and the tendency to delusion. So if you recognize something as bad, do you say to yourself, "Oh, that's bad." Or do you say, "Oh, they are bad." Or if you're doing something, you're like, "Oh, this is not good." Or do you say, "Oh, I'm not good"?

And that can be your clue to is-this-coming-from-a-place-of-delusion? And therefore it's like guilt or judgment, it has a self wrapped up in it. Or is it based on conscience, the right view, that this is an unwholesome activity? This is an unprofitable, unpleasant activity with unpleasant results.

The quickest way to tell the difference...is to just see. Are you seeing a person there? Are you examining the quality of a person, of a group, of a society, of a race, of people, of an age group, of a social class? Are you creating some sort of identity there and labeling it?

Or is it more about the activity itself and whether or not it's skillful, wholesome, useful, profitable?

And that can be a really good practice. It's kind of default to blame the person first and then look at the activity. Somebody moves your thing and you're like, "How dare they?" When you could just be saying, "Oh, don't move people's stuff, moving people's stuff is wrong." Instead you're saying, "That person's always moving my stuff. They're such an inconsiderate person. How dare they?"

One way is very simple and resolves itself very quickly.

"Yeah, that was a bad activity," but the activity is already over, whereas the other one is rooted in identity. It's very persistent and lasts a long time. That is how you form a grudge.

The thing you can know about a conclusion about a person or a judgment about a person is that it's universally wrong. That's why I say you can just look for yourself doing it. Then say, "That's no good." Just throw it out. And it's worth the work to get rid of it.

Because the thing is, the moment you make a judgment about somebody, in order to keep to that judgment, this person is X. You will have to immediately start disregarding anything that contradicts that, anything that doesn't match that. Like, this person is a fool. Well, if they just did something the day before that, that was kind of clever. You have to ignore that.

You have to gloss that over. You be like, okay, that's not the same thing, this person's a fool. Have they never done anything clever? Have they never done anything wise? And so universally all of these judgments just, they don't work.

They all have that quality of requiring ignorance. So the problem is in making the identity, it is simply, it is never a person who is good or evil. So in that way, it takes the judgment away in the sense of equalizing everything.

There are canonical examples where the Buddha just completely surveys a person's mind. He never says these people are evil.

Even Devadatta. "He made a lot of mistakes. He's going to be in hell for a long time. But then he'll get enlightened because, well, because the guy has spent a long time creating the kamma of resisting me and trying to work against me and I'm about to attain parinibbāna. And so the next time he comes back, I'm not going to be here. All of his kamma is about trying to get back at me, but I'm not going to be around. What's he going to do? So he'll just attain enlightenment when he comes back."

So we just erase and throw away all concepts of the person. We see a newscaster and it doesn't matter what branch of the media they're in and they're just saying this and that, and they're saying it really forcefully and really aggressively and really fearfully and putting out this particular message. And you check in with yourself. You're like, "I don't agree with that message. And this is really biased and this is really slanted." You tell yourself this person is trying to create fear and distrust and they're trying to push an agenda. But you're right, we don't know that. You know, making that judgment in ourselves is to really assume we know too much about their mind state. Yeah.

And it's to assume that it's not a mixed state. Probably the reason that person got to a prominent position in that network was they were doing some things right. You know, even really evil people, we can all kind of agree, that is not somebody to emulate.

They were good at a lot of things or they wouldn't have been powerful evil people. Yeah. A lot of the things they did worked for a lot of the people around them or they would have, they would have just disappeared. They would have ceased to be relevant. And so that's why we don't.

It's productive of doubt really to ask yourself like, is this a good person or is this a bad person? You're looking at kamma, you're looking at activity. Activity about body, speech and mind. And if you keep seeing unwholesome kama happening, you just move away from it. Yeah, you don't have to tell yourself that person is a fool.

You just say like, look, when I'm standing next to that person, unwholesome things keep happening. I'll stand over there. There's no self in that. It's just like, you know, if you're standing in the middle of the road and cars keep almost hitting you, maybe stand on the sidewalk, you have better odds of not getting hit by a car. And if you're standing next to a person who keeps acting in unskillful ways, then just stand somewhere else.

It's just a lot safer.