

## Dharma talk 2/23/13 Forgiveness

Always in the afternoon, I want to mention the issues that always arise  
--from working too hard and getting agitated  
--getting too sleepy

What is the right effort for this moment?

We really are just sitting here, breathing and conscious.  
You can return to this realization over and over again.  
Nothing to do, nothing to fix.

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One of our members asked me to talk about forgiveness this afternoon.

I found this quote from the Dhammapada:

“He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me’ — in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will never cease.”

“He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me’ — in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred will cease.”

(Dhammapada 1.3-4; trans. Radhakrishnan)

That is a pretty straight forward statement.

But sometimes it is in our nature to be big harborers.

Sometimes we get stuck.  
We get fixated.

Sometimes our fixations are a habit,

And if we can't let it go, we could just let it be. There it is.

Or, because the opposite is always a possibility, we can look at this another way.

Sometimes when any experience of body, heart, or mind keeps repeating itself in consciousness, it can be a signal that this thing we are fixated on, this repeat visitor is asking for a deeper and fuller understanding.

(Kornfield, p.012, A Path with Heart)

We can become curious, and investigate what this is.

--here investigation refers to penetrating phenomena, to allow the process to unfold naturally.

--this is not to arrive at any conclusions; it is not analytic.

--more like allowing the disassembly to take place because we are bringing curiosity to something that has become a fixed, predictable

This can apply to the investigation of hatred and resentments and shame which can be embedded in the desire to learn to forgive,

and you can take this same way of taking apart predictable obstacles to any seemingly fixed pattern, not just the desire to forgive and all that underlies it.

We can bring investigative curiosity to:

--physical pain

--repetitive thoughts

--boredom

--agitation

The first thing we might notice is we have an elaborate set of beliefs about the way things should have been and should be now.

Forgiveness will give up on the idea that past and the present should be something other than what they are.

That comes with the process of investigation.

We might notice our resistance to

--letting the betrayal become part of the past (as in someone that I used to know)

--willingness to let the memory fade

--if hurt or memory fade, does the person become right, or fail to be punished?

So, instead of thinking--I must forgive, instead, investigate what are the obstacles to forgiveness.

What function are those obstacles serving?

Feel to barriers you have created and the emotions you have carried because you have not forgiven, self or others.

Feel the pain of keeping your heart closed.

Be willing to feel the feelings the anger or the shame keep at abeyance.

What are they?

--sadness, loss, hurt, loneliness, distrust, emptiness

What feelings are asking for full acceptance?

Can we allow these feelings into full awareness?

And how do we try to avoid those feelings?

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Accepting these feelings as they are.

Letting go of how it should be

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This can include feeling the fullness of your sorrow.

"The danger is not that the soul should not doubt whether there is any bread, but that by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry."

Simone Weil

We can be hungry to be known and loved, we can be hurt and betrayed,  
By others and ourselves,

We can gain strength in knowing we can fully feel this truth, and it is okay.

And we allow these feelings to be temporary, rather than turn them into yet another fixation.

We can choose to point ourself in this direction, with kindness and patience, trusting the process to unfold and transform....

Eventually those old painful betrayals become understanding, compassion, wisdom. and they come to create an increased ability to be of service. There is gratitude.

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Teaching story

The Buddha was sitting under a tree talking to his disciples when a man came and spit on his face. He wiped it off, and he asked the man, "What next? What do you want to say next?" The man was a little puzzled because he himself never expected that when you spit on somebody's face, he will ask, "What next?" He had no such experience in his past. He had insulted people and they had become angry and they had reacted. Or if they were cowards and weaklings, they had smiled, trying to bribe the man. But Buddha was like neither, he was not angry nor in any way offended, nor in any way cowardly. But just matter-of-factly he said, "What next?" There was no reaction on his part.

Buddha's disciples became angry, they reacted. His closest disciple, Ananda, said, "This is too much, and we cannot tolerate it. He has to be punished for it. Otherwise everybody will start doing things like this."

Buddha said, "You keep silent. He has not offended me, but you are offending me. He is new, a stranger. He must have heard from people something about me, that this man is an atheist, a dangerous man who is throwing people off their track, a revolutionary, a corrupter. And he may have formed some idea, a notion of me. He has not spit on me, he has spit on his notion. He has spit on his idea of me because he does not know me at all, so how can he spit on me?"

"If you think on it deeply," Buddha said, "he has spit on his own mind. I am not part of it, and I can see that this poor man must have something else to say because this is a way of saying something. Spitting is a way of saying something. There are moments when you feel that language is impotent: in deep love, in intense anger, in hate, in prayer. There are intense moments when language is impotent. Then you have to do something. When you are angry, intensely angry, you hit the person, you spit on him, you are saying something. I can understand him. He must have something more to say, that's why I'm asking, "What next?"

The man was even more puzzled! And Buddha said to his disciples, "I am more offended by you because you know me, and you have lived for years with me, and still you react."

Puzzled, confused, the man returned home. He could not sleep the whole night. When you see a Buddha, it is difficult, impossible to sleep again the way you used to sleep before. Again and again he was haunted by the experience. He could not explain it to himself, what had happened. He was trembling all over and perspiring. He had never come across such a man; he shattered his whole mind and his whole pattern, his whole past.

The next morning he was back there. He threw himself at Buddha's feet. Buddha asked him again, "What next? This, too, is a way of saying something that cannot be said in language. When you come and touch my feet, you are saying something that cannot be said ordinarily, for which all words are a little narrow; it cannot be contained in them."

Buddha said, "Look, Ananda, this man is again here, he is saying something. This man is a man of deep emotions."

The man looked at Buddha and said, "Forgive me for what I did yesterday."

Buddha said, "Forgive? But I am not the same man to whom you did it. The Ganges goes on flowing, it is never the same Ganges again. Every man is a river. The man you spit upon is no longer here. I look just like him, but I am not the same, much has happened in these twenty-four hours! The river has flowed so much. So I cannot forgive you because I have no grudge against you."

"And you also are new. I can see you are not the same man who came yesterday because that man was angry and he spit, whereas you are bowing at my feet, touching my feet. How can you be the same man? You are not the same man, so let us forget about it. Those two people, the man who spit and the man on whom he spit, both are no more. Come closer. Let us talk of something else."