

## ***Accepting the Way Things Are***



The Dharma talk on June 17<sup>th</sup> was given by Jim Bronson. Jim began working with the inner life and spiritual traditions as a student of Krishnamurti in 1968. Jim's focus on Vipassana Meditation began in 1990 with Howard Nudleman and a precursor of Insight Meditation Center. Jim expresses his practice in the world through providing community outreach and education through [Kara](#) for people and groups dealing with tragedy and loss. In addition to talks and meditation instruction at IMC, Jim has organized self-taught retreats in beautiful natural settings. (You may listen to more of Jim's talks on [Audio Dharma](#))

Last night's talk, ***Accepting the Way Things Are***, was first of a three part series on ***Practicing in a Precarious World***. On June 24<sup>th</sup>, Jim will discuss ***Consciousness and Sensitivity / The Sound of Silence***, and on July 8<sup>th</sup>, he will conclude the series with a Dharma talk on ***Just One Breath***.

*Accepting the Way Things Are* relates to things in the physical world. The next talk in the series, *Consciousness and Sensitivity*, will discuss the six senses. (In Buddhism, the mind is considered to be a sense. The *salayatana*, or six senses and their objects are: Eye and Vision; Ear and Hearing; Nose and Smell; Tongue and Taste; Skin and Touch; and Mind and Thought.) The third talk, *Just One Breath*, will discuss integration of the six senses through the mindfulness of breathing.

Freedom in this life is achieved through practice. Through practice, we learn to drop illusion and be in touch with things as they are. Jack Kornfield said, "Practice is putting your butt on the cushion and taking what comes."

Practice begins with generosity (*dana*), which, over time, weakens the habitual tendencies to cling to views and things. Generosity is a gift to the giver and the receiver. The practice of *dana* is followed by the development of virtue (*sila*), the basic level of restraint and morality that helps the practitioner develop a healthy and trustworthy sense of self. The peace of mind born from this self-respect provides the foundation for all further progress along the path. Finally, the mind is trained (*bhavana*) to refine intentions and insights so that we instinctively choose the way toward freedom in every decision we make.

As a child, Prince Siddhartha (as he was known before he became the Buddha) had been raised in luxury. He was the son of a king, and had all the privileges and sensual pleasures that wealth could bring. In his sheltered life in the palace, all that was not beautiful was hidden from him. He saw no one who was deformed, or poor, or sick. His life was one long party, filled with young, beautiful rich people. One day he left the palace grounds to see what was outside. As far as he knew, the world outside the palace was the same as the world within. He was horrified and shocked as he came upon successively an old man, someone who was ill, and a corpse. He realized that his life, his beautiful life, was a sham, and only provided an illusion of hiding from age, sickness, and death. Old age, sickness, and death were the Divine Messengers, the teachers, who brought the truth of life to him.

Prince Siddhartha came upon a fourth and final Divine Messenger – a monk filled with calmness and serenity. The prince left the palace to seek answers and see if he, too, could find serenity. The story of his seeking is given in the Maha-Saccaka Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.036.than.html>)

He knew that the life of luxury, fulfilling every desire, was not the way to achieve happiness. At first, he tried the life of renunciation, depriving himself of food, comfort, material goods, and shelter. He tried giving up everything, but that did not bring happiness.

One day while with other aesthetics, the Prince recalled a time when he was a child, sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, watching his father in the fields. His father was close enough to be of comfort, but not close enough to intrude. The Prince was not surrounded by luxury and sensual delights at that moment, but yet he had become suffused with joy and utter contentment. He realized that this memory was the key to Awakening. The extremes of luxury and deprivation were not the solution for ending suffering, but the Middle Way between these two was the path to happiness. At the same time as realizing he knew where the answer could be found, he was afraid of that ultimate surrender. He sat beneath a bodhi tree wrestling with himself, until he accepted everything the way it was, recaptured that feeling of unencumbered joy, and became the One Who Awoke.

Sometimes, life can become unacceptable. Jim is currently engaged in grief counseling at a local high school, where -- in one month-- two students committed and a third attempted suicide. These students wanted the pain and confusion of life to just *stop*. Life became too much for them to accept, so they went away, leaving emotional devastation for their friends. In his work at Kara, Jim teaches acceptance of grief in these difficult circumstances.

*Kara work offers me an opportunity to work with accepting the unsatisfactoriness of grief: for example, supporting Gunn High School students, staff and parents after the suicide of two seniors in the month of May, plus an attempt.*

*The grief after a suicide is a quantum level harder than so-called normal grief. The grieving at Gunn has included the difficult or afflictive emotions of anger, guilt, reactivated grieving for lost*

*parents and friends, feelings of one's own impending death from a current chronic illness, feeling helpless in supporting grieving students, trouble sleeping, compulsivity around eating and drinking, needing to run away, fear about the loss of loved ones, and more. I coach grieverers to avoid the mental traps of analysis and blame. Rather, open to the fullness of their experience. Let the grief into their hearts. This is an example of the insight that the only way out is through - the only way to deal with the pain is to face it head-on.*

*Throughout, I see my Kara work involving both process and content. Being a compassionate presence has been the process. This requires some significant preparation on my part which always includes periods of meditation before, and sometimes during the work. The content part of my work has largely come from my study of the wisdoms and insights of Marana Sati with Buddhist teachers and in Buddhist writings.*

It is not necessary to end our lives to end suffering. The Buddha taught one thing, and one thing only: *suffering and the cessation of suffering*. Freedom comes from accepting life.

Practice gives us a way out, a way that leads us to safety. In his essay on *Meeting the Divine Messengers* ([http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay\\_32.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_32.html)), Bikkhu Bodhi explains:

*For aging, sickness, and death are not only emblems of the unsatisfactory nature of mundane existence but pointers to a deeper reality that lies beyond. In the traditional legend the old man, the sick man, and the corpse are gods in disguise; they have been sent down to earth from the highest heaven to awaken the Bodhisatta to his momentous mission, and once they have delivered their message they resume their celestial forms. The final word of the Dhamma is not surrender, not an injunction to resign ourselves stoically to old age, sickness, and death. This is the preliminary message, the announcement that our house is ablaze. The final message is other: an ebullient cry that there is a place of safety, an open field beyond the flames, and a clear exit sign pointing the way of escape.*

*If in this process of awakening we must meet old age, sickness, and death face to face, that is because the place of safety can be reached only by honest confrontation with the stark truths about human existence. We cannot reach safety by pretending that the flames that engulf our home are nothing but bouquets of flowers: we must see them as they are, as real flames.*

Not only do we escape the conflagration of confusion and illusion, but we become able to savor that which comes to us.

Acceptance of life requires frequent reflection on The Buddha's Five Remembrances given in the Upajjhatthana Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.057.than.html>).

In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (p. 115), Thich Nhat Hanh tells us that the Five Remembrances and spacious acceptance will lead to a joyful heart and overcoming suffering. He provides this translation:

*I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.*

*I am of the nature to have ill-health. There is no way to escape having ill-health.*

*I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.*

*All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.*

*My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. (My actions are the ground on which I stand.)*

The practice of the Five Remembrances is from pristine (Theravadan) Buddhism and is offered as a kind of therapy and psychology in living out the human condition. Jim suggested that each of us incorporate the Five Remembrances into our daily practice through July 8<sup>th</sup>, in preparation for the final talk.

Taking things just as they are, looking inside and knowing who we are is the path to freedom. Accepting opens the way for change -- it doesn't cause change, but does make it possible.

*Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.*

- Carl Jung

But if we are supposed to accept *what is*, what do we do when someone is being manipulative, or is not speaking the truth, whether intentionally or unintentionally? Are we supposed to accept that, even if it is wrong?

We accept that somebody said what they said; this is different from accepting that what was said was true. In the Kalama Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>), the Buddha cautions us against accepting something as true just because it came from an authority.

*Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.*

In closing...

Father Thomas Merton, a Cistercian Monk who embraced Buddhism later in his life, said that he wanted to become, "as good a Buddhist as I can." Merton died in Bangkok on his way to an international Buddhist conference. His *Asian Journal* reveals his thoughts and aspirations of those last weeks of his life. Here is an entry about spacious acceptance.

*"There is no happiness or peace without spacious acceptance. Spacious acceptance is remembering to come back to the present moment. Everything we are looking for is right here in the present moment. If we allow ourselves to be in the present moment, we have the capacity to touch wonderful things (as well as awful things). But if we do not allow ourselves to be in the present moment, we will continue to struggle.*

*Spacious acceptance helps us to live more happily and to see the nature of things more deeply. When you look at the full moon it is more beautiful. When you hug someone with full acceptance, that person will be more real and sweet.*

*Without spacious acceptance, you are not really alive. Being accepting makes everything you do brighter, more beautiful. Acceptance is like the opening of a flower that reveals its beauty to you deeply."*

Please join us next week, June 24th for '**Practicing in a Precarious World: Consciousness and Sensitivity/ The Sound of Silence**' -- Finding the freedom of 'Full Catastrophe' Living, embracing it all, knowing, at last, what to do in every situation ...