



Dhammapada: Gems of Wisdom (1 of 3)

Kim Allen

Sat, Nov 05, 2022

Kim Allen

Great, thank you, Rob, it's nice to see some familiar faces and a few that I don't know. So welcome to everyone. I'm delighted that you want to explore this wonderful text together. I hope it'll be fun. So in this class, as you read in the description, we'll be exploring Gil Fronsda's translation of the Dhammapada. It looks like this is the hardback version, there's also a paperback version. There are literally dozens of translations of the Dhammapada, and I have a bunch of them myself. We won't be focusing in this class on comparing different translations, which is a very valuable thing to do. But if our aim is to get through the entire Dhammapada, in three sessions, we're not going to really have time. So I hope that you'll be content with Gil Fronsda's translation, feel free to read other ones on your own and see how they compare. I sent a handout with some readings, and also a broad idea of the theme that we'll be covering in each of the three sessions. And so the way that we're dividing up the text is going to illuminate some of the main themes. Obviously, with the time we have, we're not going to read every single verse together. But organizing it by themes gives you some additional information about it than you would have gotten perhaps just reading it on your own. So today, we're looking at the introduction, and also chapters 1,2,5,6,7,12,15,25 and 26, the last two of which we'll see again later. And we'll also learn a little bit about the Dhammapada as a Buddhist text. I'll do some talking, and you'll have some chances also to discuss in small groups, and we'll have q&a and so forth and things will unfold from there. We're gonna finish at noon pacific time, so that makes it a 90 minute session, just so that you know.

So the Dhammapada, this wonderful text. Where is it in the Pali canon? It's part of the Khuddaka Nikāya, which is the fifth of the Nikāyas. There are five, and this last one, the Khuddaka Nikāya means literally the minor discourses, but the texts in there are not minor at all in terms of importance or profundity. So the term Dhammapada itself, is a little bit hard to translate, as Gil mentions in his introduction, or maybe it's in the preface, actually, he says that we could translate it maybe as sayings of the dhamma, or verses of the dhamma, or teachings of the dhamma. He even likes path of dharma because the word pada, which means foot could also mean path, by extension. So maybe we'll just leave it untranslated as the Dhammapada. There are several extant versions of this text, including three of them in Pali, as well as some in other Buddhist traditions. They are slightly different but that doesn't cast doubt on its veracity or its utility. Instead it's quite normal that we have multiple versions of a given Buddhist text. If you haven't looked much at the study of texts in the sense of Buddhist studies, you may not be aware of that. But there are usually multiple versions of things and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, who has researched many of the different versions of the Dhammapada that we have, says most of the differences are pretty mild.



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So the Dhammapada is often seen as kind of an introduction to Buddhist ideas, because it has a lot of the basic concepts spread throughout it. But it's definitely not totally for beginners. It includes pretty deep teachings. It also assumes some understanding of the structure of Buddhist teachings. Because it's a verse text, it doesn't have prose that explains things. So there is an assumption that you'll know what it means when it says "aggregates" or "arahant", or some of the other terminology. So if there's any term that you don't understand, you can ask during class, and we'll clear that up. But it does refer to typical Buddhist concepts. It also includes, in some of the verses, some quite clever wordplay, puns basically, that are hard to translate into English and also some fairly nuanced language. So all of that adds up to me that it goes a little bit beyond the kind of straightforwardness that you'd expect from a truly beginners text, something that serves as an introduction. So I think the Dhammapada is really for everyone, and we'll see as we go along. So the text consists of 423 verses in 26 chapters centered on various themes. But within each chapter, you'll see maybe you've already seen if you did the the reading for today, that the verses are a little bit mixed. Sometimes they refer to practice early on the path, right next to a verse that's about awakening or advanced practice. And they don't necessarily proceed linearly throughout a chapter on a given topic. But that kind of a systematic exposition of a topic is probably not something that we would expect from verse texts like this one. So it's not really the point of it either of a text like the Dhammapada. So I would encourage you to set aside any ideas that what we're going to see is a nice linear exposition of each of the chapter titles, each of those topics. Finally, I want to highlight that the Dhammapada is one of the most beloved texts of the Pali canon; people who haven't even delved into the Majjhima Nikāya, or the Samyutta Nikāya, may have read the Dhammapada. It's well known, it's loved, it's often studied by Buddhists worldwide, and for sure, it has inspired countless practitioners on their path. And now is our chance to partake of that. So I want to spend a little bit of time here at the beginning, talking through some of the main themes that Gil highlights in his introduction, if you read that. And what I'll do is, I'll give some examples of these themes from each of the chapters that we read for today. Of course, there are examples spread throughout all the other chapters also. But I'm just wanting to keep us within the range today, that we were that we were reading. The first theme I want to highlight is that contrasts are important in the Dhammapada. The contrasts of what is useful and what is not – the fool and the sage, we read two chapters about that today, what Gil calls, what the text calls, "Puñña" and "Pāpa", which is translated as merit and evil. He says something in the introduction about his choice of that word for translation. Then there are various paired chapters that contrast. So, what about these contrasts? Why are they being set up? Partly as a guide on our practice path, so that we know which way to go, is it toward or away from suffering? Also it highlights the role of wisdom, as discernment. Wisdom is the quality in our mind that discerns what is useful and what is not, what is skillful and what is not, what is going towards suffering and what is going away from suffering. That function is performed by wisdom. So, so this is really a text that highlights also how we can cultivate wisdom in some very specific ways. So as an example, I'm going to – I'll tell you which verses I'm reading in case, you want to quickly flip to them, but you don't have to, if that's distracting, because I'm going to read them. So we can look for example, at verses three and four. In chapter one.

"He abused me, attacked me, defeated me robbed me. For those carrying on like this, hatred does not end. She abused me, attacked me, defeated me robbed me. For those not carrying on like this hatred ends." So we have a direct teaching on the results of action, in this case, verbal



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and mental action, essentially. But notice this subtlety of the teaching. It's not exonerating anyone of what they did or condoning any actions. Maybe they did attack us. Maybe that happened. If that's the case, it's in the past. It's already happened, that's not going to change. Where's the choice? The choice is whether or not we carry on about it. That's a choice that we have in the present. And there's a result of that – if we choose to carry on, hatred will not end, if we choose not to carry on, hatred will end. So it's fairly straightforward. We can look at the result and decide, is that a result I want? Here's the choice to make. So you'll see many things like this, it might sound a little simplistic at first. And it's true that things are not always so straightforward. Don't worry, there are other chapters that are you know, that have more nuance in them.

Okay, so then we also have the contrast of foolish and wise. So I'm looking now at verses 64, and 65, which are in chapter five, the fool. "A fool associating with a sage, even for a lifetime, will no more perceive the dharma than a spoon will perceive the taste of soup. A discerning person who associates with a sage, even if for a brief moment, will quickly perceive the dharma, as the tongue perceives the taste of soup." So we get this lovely image of soup on a spoon, or soup on a tongue, you can feel the difference. Just in those words, about perceiving the dharma. So again, there's this pointing toward wisdom – a discerning person, that means a wise person. Gil points out that we shouldn't see these insulting lines about fools as denigrating particular people. It's rather that our mind is foolish, when we aren't mindful, or when we aren't wise, you know, which we all are like that part of each day, right? So it's more about skillful or unskillful behavior. Any of us could be a fool at a certain time. And we also have certain foolish, that is childish aspects of our mind. And through practice, we become more wise.

Okay, so then there's the contrast of merit, and evil, Puñña and Pāpa. We could also just say merit and demerit, or merit and badness might be a better translation. So we could look at verses 15 and 16 in chapter one. "One who does evil grieves in this life, grieves in the next, grieves in both worlds. Seeing one's own defiled acts brings grief and affliction. One who makes merit rejoices in this life, rejoices in the next, rejoices in both worlds. Seeing one's own pure acts brings joy and delight." So here we see a reference to rebirth, which we'll get to in a moment. So again, we have a contrast, if you don't behave well, then there's suffering not only immediately, but also in the next life. It comes from seeing these acts that we've done. Whereas if we have done good acts, then we can rejoice about that not only here, but in life to come. And it's seeing our own pure acts that can bring about joy and delight. So I admit that sometimes these merit-demerit verses can be a little bit simplistic, they might sound a little bit absolute or moralistic in certain ways. Part of this is getting used to the language of the Dhammapada. I encourage you not to be put off by the very clear distinctions that the Dhammapada makes, in some cases. If you look at, as I said before, if you look at the Dhammapada as a whole, it's an interesting mix of clear distinctions. We'll get to some subtlety even later today. So I think actually, that the Dhammapada as a whole nicely balances being simplistic and rigid, and being overly vague about what works and doesn't. It actually, I think, moves in a good clear middle path between those.

Buddhist teachings are clear about what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. That is not actually unclear in Buddhist teachings, but liberation is of a whole different order. So we have to know the clear distinctions in order to walk the path, but in the end, the mind is going to move



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beyond just distinguishing this from that, this from that. So it's a little bit of a matter of which part of the path are we speaking to, and which aspect of cultivation are we speaking to. So that then points us toward the two different goals that are expressed in Dhammapada. So one goal is happiness and a better rebirth. We saw that previously in the verses I just read about – one who does evil grieves in this life, grieves in the next, grieves in both worlds. And then one who does merit, rejoices and has a good rebirth. Right? So that's seen as a valid goal in Buddhism, and a lot of Buddhists worldwide, today, are practicing actually for a better rebirth. That's their actual aim. The Buddha taught that because he wanted people to do good, to do merit, to be skillful, and learn ethics very deeply, and be able to enact that in their lives. It's nice to know it on one hand, but can we actually do it? Those of us who were practicing that, we know that is no small feat in and of itself, to enact right speech, right action, kindness. So that is extolled actually in the Dhammapada as an excellent way to live. But there is another goal, also – the goal of liberation, of escaping, not just getting a better rebirth, but escaping the cycle of rebirth completely, as a friend of mine said recently, "exiting the premises". So that can also be a valid goal. There's lots and lots of examples of this, but if I wanted to pick one from our readings for this week, we see it in chapter seven, the arahant, verse 97: "The person who has gone beyond faith, knows the unmade, has severed the link, destroyed the potential for rebirth, and eliminated clinging, is the ultimate person." So this verse is clearly extolling the wish to become an arahant, who is someone who has become liberated, fully awakened, will not be reborn. So my understanding of this is that it means that everybody who's reading the Dhammapada can find a path, everybody can find something that's inspiring for them, and find a way to practice from reading these verses.

Then we come to two issues for modern readers to consider. One of them is that the the Dhammapada does have a clear emphasis on renunciation, on solitude, on monasticism. There is no doubt that that is held up as an ideal way of living. We might consider, "Do we just ignore every verse that seems to be about that, because we're lay people and that's not what we're doing?" Maybe there's a way we could take them to heart in some way. And then maybe going hand in hand with that is an apparent denial of the world. So you know, there's definitely verses that point toward the pointlessness of pursuing any form of pleasure, things like that. And so again, we can consider, well, instead of denying the world, what we're denying, or what we're letting go of, is attachment, attachment to the world. It's not the world itself, I mean, here we are, but we don't want to be attached that will lead to dukkha. So maybe as a verse I picked out from our readings is verses 87 and 88, in chapter six, the sage: "Giving up dark ways, sages cultivate the bright. They go from home to homelessness, to the solitude so hard to enjoy. There, they should seek delight, abandoning sensual pleasures, having nothing. Sages should cleanse themselves of what defiles the mind." So you might read that and kind of not really feel turned on by that image. Maybe you do. But some people read it and say hmm.. But we might consider just taking the possibility of the flavor of these verses as an inspiration for lay life. You know, we know of most people who've practiced for a while, are aware that just pursuing sense pleasures and comfort isn't very meaningful. It doesn't really deeply satisfy us. So how can we live a life, whatever life we've chosen, in a way that is in line with this Buddhist teaching that grasping at desires and pleasure all the time just isn't going to do it for us? What does that mean for us as laypeople? If we live with a lot of other people in our family and we think, "well, solitude isn't really how I live." Could it be that we can find a way to be, a phrase that Gil sometimes uses actually is, to be alone with others? Can we have mindfulness and clarity, and some degree of



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independence while we're with other people? Ironically, a mind that is mindful and clearer is able to be more connected to other people than one that's kind of falling into attachment in the relationship.

Okay, so maybe then the last area I want to talk about is the contrasting flavors, that is mentioned in the introduction. This is referring to something I won't go into great detail on this. But remember, this is an ancient Indian text, and it came out of ancient Indian culture. At that time, and I think maybe even now, there is a concept in Indian aesthetics (the arts of various kinds, drama, plays, stories) that is called "savor". "Rasa" is the Sanskrit word. There's an idea that there's a given set of savors, their emotion, emotional tones, essentially, that the piece is meant to evoke in us, it's meant to touch in us or speak to in some way. They're kind of the emotions of the human conditions like we would see them in the Greek plays also, for example. The idea is that you would have one main one, and then a contrasting one that plays off of it to show the complexity of being human. So that's my super top level summary of that. Someone who's a scholar in it, I hope wouldn't wince too much, but we have much more to say.

The contrasting flavors that we see in the Dhammapada, a work of literature from that time. One of them is energy, "viriya", also called the heroic flavor. And then the other is peace. "santi". You may have heard the Sanskrit version of that word "shanti", meaning peace, so Pāli would be "santi". So we have viriya and santi. Energy is characterized or exemplified in chapter two, which we read, and the peace is exemplified in chapters 15 and 25, which we also read for this week. So let's look a bit at some verses from chapter, actually from various chapters, but I'll start with chapter two. It opens with a famous verse that some of you may have heard quoted, verse 21: "Vigilance is the path to the deathless, negligence, the path to death. The Vigilant do not die, the negligent are as if already dead." So here's one more contrast – vigilance and negligence. One more thing set up for wisdom to discern. And there's some stark language there, that is partially metaphorical. We can see the relative deadness of being unmindful. If somebody's very distracted, when your mind is distracted, not connected to the present moment, not really paying that much attention, we all go through moments like that every day. Isn't there a kind of deadness to the mind, compared to moments when you're feeling mindful, aware, connected, present. There's an aliveness there. So that I think is what's being pointed to here. We might also look at verse 25, also in chapter two: "Through effort, vigilance, restraint and self control, the wise person can become an island no flood will overwhelm." So you really see the clear pointing here to, you know, energy, heroism, vigilance, restraint, effort. We don't emphasize this as dharma teachers in the West too much, because you may have noticed that some of us are a little bit predisposed toward over striving. But if we read Buddha's teachings, we really can't ignore that this is a theme, particularly in the Dhammapada. But really across all the texts is that the Buddha encouraged really clear effort to be present, to be mindful to investigate experience, and so forth. I would say that we also see some encouragement toward effort in chapter 12, which is called "oneself" in a sense, where we're asked to really take responsibility for our actions and hence our own happiness. So I want to read a couple from there too. So verse 157, from Chapter 12: "If one knew oneself to be precious, one would guard oneself with care. The sage will watch over herself in any part of the night." So we have this sense of vigilance and guarding ourselves. It means guarding the sense doors, with care, because we care about ourselves, we are mindful in order that our mind doesn't get overtaken, like the previous verse said, our mind can become an island that no flood can overwhelm. Why we do that is because



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we know ourselves to be precious. We care about our own heart, our own state of mind. So we make effort to keep the mind in a wholesome state. We also see in verse 160: "One, indeed, is one's own protector. What other protector could there be? With self control one gains a protector hard to obtain." So again, this sense that we would be vigilant and careful with our practice, as a protection for ourselves, it also is a protection for others, as we know, but of course, in the chapter on oneself, it's emphasizing toward ourselves.

Okay, so that let me turn then to the second of the saviors, the savor of peace, Santi. You can see that's kind of a contrast to effort and energy and trying hard, striving. And then we get to the peace. So this is a contrast and maybe one leads to the other. I think I can't talk about peace, though, unless I make the point right from the start, that in Buddhist teachings, peace and happiness are strongly linked. They're clearly related. Almost every chapter that talks a lot about peace, also talks a lot about happiness and joy. So, for example, we can look in chapter 15, verse 198: "Ah! So happily we live, without misery among those in misery, among people in misery, we live without misery." So there's a sense of this happiness that just comes from within, this ability to be at peace in a world that is not at peace, not happy, maybe miserable. There are some similar verses that talk about anger, and I think, ambition that are of a similar flavor. And then we also have verse 201: "Victory gives birth to hate, the defeated sleep in anguish. Giving up both, victory and defeat, those who have attained peace, sleep happily." So here we have a contrast, again, between victory and defeat. But it's not a simplistic contrast, right? Where this is the good one, this is the bad one. It says giving up both – victory and defeat. So here, we get our first flavor of some of the nuance that we have in the Dhammapada. If you try to read that, literally, you might say, what does that even mean to give up both victory and defeat? You stop playing the game. That is what the state of peace is about is stopping to play those games. So we see that there's a movement from looking at contrast – which one is better, this one is good, this one's bad – to the possibility of releasing that kind of mindset. That's what maybe what the peace is about, and it's linked, of course, to happiness. So awakening helps us step out of these distinctions in some ways. Then I want to mention also some from chapter 25, because remember, 15, and 25 are the ones that kind of most exemplify Santi. Verse 373, Chapter 25, "the bhikkhu", that means a monk by the way, but it could also just mean a serious practitioner. So we were being spoken to there also: "For a bhikkhu with a peaceful mind, who enters an empty dwelling and clearly sees the true dharma, there is superhuman joy." Wow. So this is for a practitioner who reaches any of the stages of awakening, but it could be speaking to us. And then verse 381: "A bhikkhu, filled with delight and pleased with the Buddha's teachings attains happiness, the stilling of formations, the state of peace." So it's interesting that he says attains happiness. But then the stilling of formations and the state of peace, those are descriptions of nibbāna – freedom of complete awakening. That's the highest happiness. So again, we have peace and happiness, relatively inseparable. Yeah. So I think I will pause there. We've gone over all the ideas that Gil introduces in the introduction, and linked them to verses that were in our readings for today. And at this point, I wonder if you have questions, either about what we've talked about the main ideas that Gil highlights as being important in the Dhammapada, or other verses from our reading that you might have questions about. I have a little bit more to say later. But I'll stop here for for now.

Oh, and if you if you wanted to ask a question, it'd be great if you could, like Steve, raise your zoom hand because that puts you to the top of the list, the top of the boxes, so I can see you.



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And please keep your hand up while you're talking in order that you don't disappear. Then the other thing I want to ask what feels right in the moment is, I'm spotlighted right now, and that means that the recording is capturing my video as well as my voice. If you choose to be spotlighted, everybody else will be able to see you and I'll be able to see you better, but you'll also be recorded on the video. So you have a choice. When I call on you if you want to be spotlighted or if you are if you don't. So Steve, your first would you like to be spotlighted or not? No need? Okay, but please keep your hand up so I can see you. Go ahead.

Questioner:

When I read the chapter on "self", it occurred to me that Gil did not discuss that in the introduction. Since there's so much in the teachings of not-self, here's a chapter on self. So I wonder if you might address that.

Kim Allen

Great question. I want to start a class on surprises in the suttas, like suttas that I think are surprising. And I chose chapter 12 of the Dhammapada entitled "oneself" as one of them. So yes, there's a whole teaching on self, skillful self. If you read it, as you read in the chapter, a lot of the teachings in chapter 12 are about how we can guard ourselves or protect ourselves, and how the way that we're acting is either harming ourselves or benefiting ourselves. So these are teachings that are in the realm of skillful behavior, skillful action, and how to use our sense of ourself, as a being, who matters in the world, as a means of walking the path, caring about ourselves and cleaning up our mind and our heart. It's not like it's somebody else's mind and heart. It's definitely yours. So it's our five aggregates, if you will. So, there is ultimately, in the end, there isn't any given thing that we could name as our self as the attā. The Buddha was clear about that, but he didn't shy away from the idea that we are a being who's responsible for our development on the path. Does that help? Okay, great. Thank you.

Questioner:

Hi Kim. What's the difference between peace and happiness?

Kim Allen

Um, well, there are different qualities. Do you feel that there's a difference in your mind between peace and happiness?

Questioner:

I'm confused about it.

Kim Allen

Ah, well, they are strongly linked, as I said, and in the teachings for sure. I think it's something that we can experience for ourselves is that happiness has a wide range, let's say it that way. There's the happiness of a birthday party, and the kind of joy and excitement that goes with that. And then there's also the happiness that we can feel when meditation becomes deep on the cushion. The body is just filled with this very tranquil sense of ease. And that's another form of happiness. Right? So the Buddha, I think, in linking happiness and peace, is kind of pointing us down the track on happiness, to look for the refinement of it. How could my happiness be more peaceful, even more peaceful than it is? Some versions are more peaceful than others? Does



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that start to answer your question? Yeah, we can sense into it experientially, but they're both very good. We want both happiness and peace to come from practice.

Questioner:

Hi, there. Sorry about that. Nice to meet everybody. This is the first class I've been to in a while. Thank you very much, Kim. Appreciate it. Couple of quick questions. Well, first of all, I did not receive the handouts. I didn't see them in the email that was sent to me. Can you clarify where the handouts are?

Kim Allen

Oh, okay. Yeah, they were sent in an attachment along with the email that had the Zoom link in it. If you reach out to the sati center email, like maybe they were just sent in a format that somehow you couldn't receive, Rob can make sure you get it for next time.

Questioner:

Okay and the other two questions are, is the dhammapada considered the centerpiece and key learnings of Buddhism similar to Tao Te Ching and Taoism?

Kim Allen

I wouldn't say so. It's part of the broad spectrum of the teachings in the Nikayas and the Suttas. And it's one that's, as I said, beloved, and it's kind of an overview text that's short and approachable. So a lot of people have read it. But I wouldn't say it defines the Buddhist teachings in the way that the Tao de Ching does.

Questioner:

Is there a Buddhist book that is similar to the Tao Te Ching is to Tao?

Kim Allen

That's a good question. I bet everybody who studies the suttas has their favorite set. The only sutta that I could name within this western insight tradition, is the satipatthana sutta, that's the sutta on the establishment of mindfulness that has the instructions that we use at most of our major retreats. So that's the instructions on how to establish mindfulness, which is the key practice that we do. But as far as exemplifying the Buddhist teachings, no, even the satipatthana sutta doesn't do that.

Questioner:

Okay. Yeah. And then the last question is, doesn't the pursuit of happiness sort of seem like a cloud or formation and sort of inconsistent with this idea of trying to eliminate those types of pursuits?

Kim Allen

Yeah, you're pointing towards some subtlety in that it's true that the Buddha says, at some point that the part of the path is to eliminate quests. So there is that aspect. But the Buddha was very skilled as a teacher, and he knew that deep in the human heart, we all want to be happy. That's something that we all share. So the problem is that we don't know what happiness is or how to get it. That's the problem. The ignorance or the delusion around what it really means, how do I



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get it, is happiness getting the right partner, getting a good job and living in a suitable place? Is that enough? Most of us, if you actually achieve those things, which by the way, is not that easy, we find it's not enough. And so these teachings use a little carrot, it says there's a better happiness, there's a better happiness, all the way until eventually, yes, we do have to let go of wanting to be happy, because it's a want. But it's a good want, if we pursue it through the methods of the path. So we don't start at the end. Does that help?

Questioner:

It does. Your final comments on that, do you seem to say that sort of dropping that pursuit ultimately supersedes the actual pursuit itself?

Kim Allen

In the end, the happiness of letting go is greater than any happiness we can attain. Let's say it that way.

Questioner:

Got it. Thanks.

Questioner:

Thank you, Kim. My questions are about 26, "the brahman". I was really blown away by the extensive phrases and pages and pages devoted to the brahman. I never considered that role significant before. I pretty much put the brahman in the role of the hereditary priestly class and didn't consider that they also have a spiritual path. So that was quite a shock.

Kim Allen

I'm gonna say a little bit more about chapter 26 later. The Buddha is using the term "brahman" differently than the hereditary religious class.

Questioner:

Well, my question specifically, verse 420, do you want to take that later? In that verse, he refers to an arahant and a brahman. So I was a little confused.

Kim Allen

Yeah. You've picked out exactly the verse, where he finally makes it clear. So in all of chapter 26, the brahman refers to the arahant. And we'll talk about that more later in the class.

Questioner:

Okay, thank you.

Kim Allen

Yeah, but I'm delighted that you picked that up.

Questioner:

Thank you for offering this class. I'm wondering if you can offer some your thoughts or some insight regarding chapter five, verse 62.



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Kim Allen

Okay. A fool suffers? Yes.

Questioner:

Yeah. "A fool suffers thinking, I have children, I have wealth. One's self is not even one's own. How then are children? How then is wealth?" It seems like a smattering of, I don't know how to make sense of it.

Kim Allen

Yeah. So this is a teaching, this is contrasting with chapter 12, about the self. Right? So this is a not-self teaching. And he's pointing quite directly to, this is maybe in that realm where Gil says, It sounds like a denial of the world. It sounds like it's saying that you shouldn't enjoy your children or your wealth or something like that, those are not a valid form of happiness. Those are a valid form of happiness, in a sense, but we have to admit that if we're attached to our children or our wealth, there is dukkha, isn't there? Anybody who has children knows that the challenges of when there is attachment, strong attachment there. So it's a strong teaching, but he's pointing toward not possessing even the things that we find most dear to our heart, not even grasping those. Things that we're sure are ours in a sense, they certainly make the whole flavor of our life, even grasping to those will lead to suffering. So someone who doesn't realize that whose life is just about getting wealth and all wrapped up in the lives of their children, there's a lot of suffering there. And he's saying that there's another way through understanding non possession. Yeah, these verses are quite succinct. There's a whole sutta that unfolds the ideas here. It's Sutta Nipata 1.2, the "Dhaniya Sutta". Different text, but it's partly on my mind, because we're going to teach about it in January. There's a whole sutta where there's a wealthy cowherd, essentially, who is debating with the Buddha about what true wealth and security are about. And if you read that sutta, this verse pretty much is a compact version of the sutta. I'll put in the chat, what that reference is, for those who can look it up, Sutta Nipata (Sn) 1.2.

Questioner:

All right. Hi, Kim. I appreciate the opportunity to talk. This is a lot of fun. My question has to do with the idea you mentioned from the Dhammapada of the mind becoming an island that no flood can overcome. When I'm hearing you talk about that made me think back to something Gil lectured on in one of his morning sittings about having a mind like an open house, which sounds like a bit of a contrast. I think I have some idea that they don't really conflict, those two ideas don't really conflict with each other. But I was hoping to hear you talk about that to some degree.

Kim Allen

Do you mean his use of the mind as an open house as an analogy for mindfulness?

Questioner:

Yeah, and I think the distinction is that, the way I understand it, and please correct me if I'm looking at it in the wrong way. So you can have a mind like an open house but be guarded in the sense of keeping an eye out both externally and internally for the three poisons, as they're called. And being mindful of that when they arise, if you can do so both internally and externally, then you're okay.



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Kim Allen

Right, what what we want is a mind that can't be overwhelmed, right? So when things happen, maybe something very beautiful, or something very terrible comes into our visual field, we don't get overwhelmed by that and reactive to it in some way. So I think it's actually pointing to the same idea. The image of a flood is a specific image in Buddhism of the flood of sensuality, the flood of becoming, and the flood of ignorance. There's actually a list of the floods, but we could say greed, hatred, and delusion, those are the poisons, but it's a similar list of problems of the mind. And we want a mind that strong, through what vigilance and a mindfulness, mind that's strong enough that it can't be knocked over easily by these things.

Questioner:

Thank you for the offering. I'm really glad that you did verse 201. With the elections coming up, my thinking is, it would be a really good idea to master giving up both victory and defeat. I'm kind of thinking about that in my head. Am I giving up the expectation of an outcome? Am I giving up being invested in the outcome? What do I need to let go so I can sleep peacefully on Tuesday night?

Kim Allen

Great practical question. Yeah. So this verse, I think, I think the way you're framing it, we could say it has a couple different levels. And maybe one level is true equanimity. So I don't mean equanimity like I don't care. True equanimity allows us to care about things, but accept that conditions are not in our control. So we do our best and then accept how things actually are without any dukkha because the conditions are as they are. So that's one way to let go of victory and defeat is to just be able to acknowledge the reality as something that came about through multiple conditions. And that's how it is. The people who are very equanimous can act in the world but not get stuck on whether or not they succeeded or failed. So that's one level. And then another level would be more the ultimate level where the concepts of victory and defeat are not relevant to an arahant, because there's no person who could win or lose. So it's not a meaningful distinction. And that's a different level. Does that make sense in some way? In a practical sense? How does that land for you for Tuesday night?

Questioner:

Well, I'm going to do a lot of practicing around equanimity. Because I don't think I'm an arahant yet so.

Kim Allen

No, I just wanted to be complete. Yes, for Tuesday, we have multiple conditions, we're not in control. We've done our best. And the conditions will unfold naturally, as naturally as dropping this pen. It's going to fall because of gravity. It'll be as it is.

Okay, thank you for all the good questions. Yeah, glad to hear all those. So let's go ahead now with some small group discussion. For those of you who are saying, "Oh, no, I hate small group discussion", it'll be pretty short. And some of you may be looking forward to it. So we will have groups of three or four. When you get into your group, I think we'll give, let's see, you can just have a discussion among yourselves, and we'll say 10 minutes in the group. The question for you to consider, and I'll put it in the chat also, is, how do you relate to the flavors as they were



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called of energy and peace in the text? Do you feel different tones, kind of different emotional tones from the energy and the peace? How does your heart respond to each one of those?

Okay, so I think that is everybody coming back. Thank you. I hope you've had a good discussion. And I realized we didn't have the timer on there, but it was actually 10 minutes. So I was hoping that some people might have a couple comments to share about how that was for you, or any wisdom that may have come up from your group?

Questioner:

Thank you, Kim. In our group, the question of the difference between calm and peace was kind of ambiguous. Can you speak to that?

Kim Allen

Calm and peace? Yeah, they're similar. I suppose there's a distinction in the teachings between feelings like tranquility, which would be calm or various forms of samadhi or samatha, that are characterized by calm, and then peace might be a synonym for that. But there can also be the peace that is pointed to by nibbana as peace, and that is not characterized by particular qualities that we would point to. So I think, though, in the terms of the Dhammapada, we could say that calm and peace are very much similar. What came out in your discussion, anything else? Besides them being vague?

Questioner:

Oh, one thing that one of the participants brought up that I thought was spot on was relating these verses, or, rather, attaining peace, through the seven factors of enlightenment, what's required mindfulness, and then the word you use energy that leads to tranquility and joy, and eventually concentration and equanimity. So that seems to fit quite well or did in our discussion.

Kim Allen

Yeah, I would agree there's the calm of tranquility and concentration and then there's nibbana that has, is a different dimension, let's say awakening.

Questioner:

In our group, a very interesting point came up as to whether or not the Buddha was being judgmental in talking about fools, and about bad behavior and things like this. And I can see that that kind of perception is easy because of language. And we were talking about whether it was pointing to character or whether it was pointing to behavior and the consequences of behavior. So could you just talk about that a little?

Kim Allen

Yeah, I think Gil mentions it too in the introduction. He says it points to actions, to behavior. It's about skillful and unskillful. And yes, in modern psychology, we worry a lot about judgmentalism because it can be done unskillfully. But when you look in terms of the results of action, it's clear that some things lead to suffering and some things lead away from suffering. That's an important distinction to be able to make if you're going to walk the path. So there's judiciousness and there's judgmentalism. And it's good to know the difference between them.



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Questioner:

Our group wasn't quite sure if there was a specific passage that we were supposed to be looking at. But we had a nice discussion about whether, peacefulness, and energy, could they coexist, basically. We ended up talking a little bit about how one can maybe lead to – being peaceful can maybe lead to having more positive energy to invest in something in the real world? Or that being peaceful could be the reduction of that kind of agitation or negative energy? I guess. So not a specific question. Just some highlights from our discussion.

Kim Allen

I love that they are meant to be things that complement each other in a sense, and they could coexist, and they may be purify each other also. So I think your group's discussion highlighted all those different dimensions. It sounds sounds quite beautiful. Thank you. Nice.

Okay, well, then, let's actually sit for a few minutes, because I'm going to do a short guided meditation and drop in some verses, so that we can experience these teachings in somewhat different mode, right? We've read them maybe by ourselves, we heard me talk about them and read some of them. You talked about them in a small group. You can also experience these verses through the meditative mind. So it'll just be brief. But please take a posture where you can sit for a few minutes. Be comfortable, no need to change too much. Just find a comfortable place and if it's okay for you, you could close your eyes. Otherwise, they can just be gently open. Just allowing your attention to come inward, bringing it, pulling it back from the screen, just into your body, finding the body. Perhaps bringing the attention to the place where you're sitting in your seat against the chair, perhaps maybe your feet are against the floor. So what is supporting you for your attention there. Just gently allowing yourself to feel balanced, where you're sitting. If you've been leaning forward to look at the screen you might need to straighten up a bit. Using fewer muscles to hold yourself up, and gently connecting to a simple object. Often people use the breath but if that doesn't work for you, you can use sound in the environment, just the natural background sounds around you, just to rest the mind on something simple. Just allowing mindfulness of that object to be the main focus just for a few minutes, letting thoughts or other things go more into the background.

It's supportive for meditation to relax so softening the shoulders, allowing them to drop naturally. Maybe softening the face, jaw, softening down through the chest area, the belly. Letting go of any bracing in the arms and legs, anything that's willing to let go. I'm just going to read two verses, letting just like the words drop in the way you'd drop a stone into a well perhaps. "Absorbed in meditation, persevering, always steadfast, the wise touch Nirvana, the ultimate rest from toil. Tasting the flavor of solitude and peace, one becomes free of distress drinking the flavor of dharma joy."

I'd like to now say just a bit more about the readings for today. And also a bit about how to approach reading suttas in general, and verses in particular. So we haven't yet said anything about chapter 26. Officially, although we had a perfect question earlier from Sharon about it. So this is the chapter that's called the brahman and it brings together many of the themes that are throughout the Dhammapada. It's a long chapter I know, and it brings them together in a particular way through the Buddha's definition of a Brahmin. And just to familiarize you with the word I know some of you know it, but the Brahmins were the hereditary religious class in ancient



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Indian society. And the Buddha was from a different class called the Kattiyas. They were more the aristocrats or the warriors and they were the governmental figures. The Brahmins consider themselves the highest spiritually, which makes sense if you're the religious caste, but the Buddha as he often did, in his teachings, he redefined the terms of his time to suit his teaching. In particular, he redefined the term brahman to mean "arahant", the highest spiritual person in his teaching. And so we see this in chapter 26, where a number of the stanzas start with whoever, blah, blah, blah, does certain things or has certain qualities. And then the last line is "I call a brahman". So for example, verse 391: "Whoever does no ill through body, speech and mind, and is restrained in these three areas, I call the brahman." So he's saying effectively, that it doesn't matter that you're of this class because your parents were, it matters instead, what you do and how you are. That's what defines the quality of a person spiritually. It's not good enough that you have this birth, pure for seven generations back, show me that you're ethical, show me that you're wise. Oh, people asked about the – it's verse 23, and verse 205 are what I read during the meditation.

So there's a distinction drawn between the arahants, and the brahmins through these kinds of verses. Then I'll also say that in chapter 26, there's a different distinction drawn between the arahant and various other ascetic practitioners at the time. So the Brahmins weren't the only other spiritual people, there was a whole group of people who opted out of society. There was a way that you could live in ancient India where you became homeless, you became a mendicant, and people would feed you effectively if you wandered with an alms bowl, and meditated out in the woods and so forth. That was an accepted way of life, kind of. And the Buddha was one of those people. He left his family, he left his position in society. But he wasn't the only one doing that. There were other ascetics out there teaching. So he was also contrasting his teaching with other ascetics. Some of them were doing genuine ascetic practice, like eating only a few grains of rice per day, or wearing tree bark as their clothing, or acting like a dog, there was a dog duty ascetic, is the name, and there was also an ox duty ascetic, people who acted like oxen. And there were beliefs that that was a good way to purify the mind, to burn up karma. The Buddha makes it clear that, in his understanding, those practices are not onward leading. Just doing asceticism and denial of the body, kind of for no other purpose than pure purification, is not actually purifying the mind. Purifying the mind is different than that. So we see, for example, in verse 394: "Fool, what use is matted hair, what use is a deerskin robe, the tangled jungle is within you, and you groom the outside." So it's the heart and the mind where we have challenges with attachment, greed, hatred, and delusion. It's not going to help to never comb your hair or live out in the forest and not eat very much. It's a different path that the Buddha offers to becoming a good and eventually enlightened human being.

So we'll read chapter 26, again, for the third class, and I think you'll see more in the second time, if you read it for today, and if you read it again, a couple of weeks from now. So that leads to my speaking a little bit in the last few minutes about how to approach these texts. So I like to speak pretty directly about having a relationship with spiritual texts. It includes some of the qualities of relationship, of getting to know them, of trusting and giving yourself to them in a certain way in order that you can receive more deeply from them to gain some intimacy, essentially. So here are some possibilities that you can try in your relationship with texts. One is to read somewhat slowly. So you know, reading, if it's something that you do throughout your day for your job, often, we're just reading quickly for ideas or content. Let me scan through this



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email, let me quickly read this article in preparation for the meeting. But we don't want to do that with spiritual texts. So you can deliberately read it slowly. You can also read just before meditating. So it's hard to read during meditation like I did, because you have to break the meditation. But if you read just beforehand, there's a way that the ideas can kind of inform the sit or infuse the heart in a certain way. You can also read through and maybe you had this experience, if you did the reading before this class is that certain verses kind of catch in your mind and you say, "oh, that's an interesting one." Well, if that happens, great. Carry that verse around with you for the day. If you read in the morning, and there's one that catches your eye, just jot it down and read it a few times throughout your day and see how it might interact with your mind during the day. Or you could consider a theme for the day, you know, today is about vigilance. You know, let's see. So you read that chapter. And then you see how vigilance shows up or doesn't, maybe it's a day of negligence, and so you see the contrast. But just carrying a theme or an idea, and letting it kind of resonate with your daily life activities and see how it comes through.

And then another thing I do sometimes is I reread a certain chapter several times with a gap in between. So read it one morning, and I'll read it two days from now, and then I'll read it over the weekend, and each time we'll see how it strikes us differently. And you'll see that wait a minute, this is the third time I'm reading this chapter, and I don't think I even saw this stanza until today. It's like, we've different things stand out at different times. So I encourage you to explore play around with these verses. They're short and sweet. So it's, you can do this with prose suttas also, all these various techniques, but the verses are particularly nice and approachable for that. Good. Let me say a little bit about what to do for next week. So you'll have another set of verses, of chapters to read. I think the whole thing was in that handout, but in case you didn't get it, make sure you do. There's another set of chapters to read for next week. And I also would like if you remember to come prepared with two verses, one verse that you found particularly inspiring. And then second verse that you found puzzling in a dharmic way. So something that catches your interest and you wonder about how it plays out in practice, or you wonder what it means dharmically, something like that. So one that you find inspiring and when you find dharmically puzzling, and maybe try out some of these ways to interact with the texts. So we have a couple minutes if there is any last questions or something that would help you feel complete.

Questioner:

Oh, I need something to make me feel complete this morning. I figured that out. They'd be all figured out this afternoon. Just put an offer out. There's a whole bunch of reciting of the Dhammapada on YouTube, from various teachers, if people want to just listen to it. I've been actually enjoying listening to it. And then also I spent a lot of time on Wikipedia this morning looking up "brahman" and there's a quite a long historical discussion of what time, what the Brahmins were doing, depending on what era in India. So I just want to offer that out if people want to read that. Thanks.

Kim Allen

Thank you Chris. And thank you for pointing toward the recordings. There are a number of them and I encourage you to listen to a variety if you want. On the IMC website, which is



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insightmeditationcenter.org, Gil reads this text actually. So if you want to see this particular translation read, you can look there also. Thank you.

Questioner:

I don't know if this is necessary or not. But it occurred to me if there are members, participants today, who aren't all that familiar with, when you say attachment, because it's such a loaded word in English, we think what? What does it mean? I shouldn't be attached to my kids kind of thing between that, that it refers to clinging. It's not it's not that we shouldn't enjoy but the clinging piece, and we don't use that word so much. But if you think that's important, maybe just mentioned,

Kim Allen

okay, yeah, of course, this is not about attachment theory in psychology. In Buddhism, attachment is generally not healthy. It's a grasping or clinging or unhealthy kind of gripping. We can feel how it has that contraction to it.

Okay, good. Well, enjoy your week. Thank you so much for being here today. And I will look forward to seeing you same time next week. Enjoy the reading. Take care.