

## ***Wholeness Through Relationship***

*Based on a talk given by Rev. angel Kyodo Williams on February 3, 2007 at the Center for Transformative Change/New Dharma Meditation Center in Berkeley, California.*

Good morning.

So the hopefully enticing quote on our flyers is from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, Book One, Verse 21, "For those who seek liberation wholeheartedly, liberation is near." The one that I didn't include that just follows it is, "How near depends on whether the practice is mild, moderate or intense." That's usually the verse that we don't really want to hear. It basically says that liberation has something to do with our degree of relationship and application of our own practice, that it doesn't just kind of descend on us.

In fact, I was just, unfortunately, as I always am, saying to someone that self-liberation is not a noun; it's a verb. You don't acquire it. You don't get it and kind of keep it. You don't even stumble upon it or step in it as an interesting discovery on the bottom of your shoe. You do it.

Self-liberation is something that we participate in. Thus, if you seek this action wholeheartedly, it is near, but it depends on you. And we have thousands and thousands of years of texts that point to different modes of connecting with that self-liberation. Slightly unfortunately for us, a lot of them point to ways in which we can do it in some variation of a cave, some form or fashion of something quite far away. In fact, I was looking through the *Dhammapada* and one of the essential things was that you live far away from others. And the ox herding tales talk about going away up on to the mountain, away--away from everyone else and finding your realization and then coming back down to actually manifest it.

What about those of us that choose to be here with everyone else? What about those of us that find ourselves in the ridiculously uncomfortable position of actually having to deal with other people? What do they have to say about that? It's pretty thin, actually. But

at least the *Yoga Sutra* tells us that sickness, apathy, doubt, carelessness, laziness, sexual indulgence, delusion, lack of progress, and inconstancy are all distractions that by stirring up the patterns of consciousness they act as barriers to our stillness. Which stillness? The stillness out of which arises the pure awareness that enables us to connect with our self-nature. Sickness, apathy, doubt, carelessness, laziness--any of these sound familiar?--sexual indulgence, delusion, lack of progress, and inconstancy are all distractions.

We have our work cut out for us is what this is saying. When they do practice, one may experience distress, depression or the inability to maintain steadiness of posture or breathing.

Posture. Interesting choice of words. And so here we are, yoga is talking about postures all the time, isn't it? In fact, everything we hear about yoga talks about postures, and so immediately we're thinking, Well, what does *argumadushanasana* have to do with relating to other people?

Quiet as it's kept, the *Yoga Sutra*, as it was written, had nothing to do with the hatha yoga body postures. There are about three lines in all 195 sutras that are actually dedicated to speaking in any way, shape, or form about what we in the West most focus on when we say the word "yoga." Yoga, in fact, from this particular perspective, is by this time strongly influenced by the rise, and also a little bit of a fall, of this interesting fellow referred to as Buddha.

On the other hand, this interesting fellow referred to as Buddha was strongly influenced and no doubt practicing the yoga that is then captured in this sutra. So it is all mixed up and here we are in the West acting like yoga and meditation are entirely separate from each other and you're either a yogi or you're a meditator, you're either a Buddhist or a yoga something, and there it is.

Every once in a while the yogis will sneak in a little bit of meditation, and every once in a while these meditators will get a little yoga on, hatha yoga, body yoga, yoga of the body. In general we have kept the philosophies very, very far apart. We have seen

them and they have been presented to us as quite far apart.

I'd like to settle that debate with not a whole bunch of information but with just a couple of lines that point to four things that may be familiar to those of us who've had any experience with the *Buddha dharma*, the dharma of the Buddha, the *Yoga Sutra* goes on to say that "Consciousness settles as one radiates friendliness, compassion, joy and equanimity toward all things whether pleasant or painful, good or bad."

Anyone recognize those four things? They are commonly referred to as the *Brahmavihāras*, the Four Divine Abodes or the Four Immeasurables. This is not tucked away in the back of the *Yoga Sutra* index someplace. This is right there in Book One. It is the first thing mentioned in a list of potential practices. The very first thing. I could go on; some of them will sound familiar to you:

They say you can also pause after breath flows in or out. You can also steadily observe as new sensations materialize. Does that sound familiar? Or when experiencing thoughts that are luminous or free of sorrow or by focusing on things that do not inspire attachment or through meditative absorption in any desired object. And it goes on.

For today's purposes I'm going to actually turn our attention to this, Verse 33, because it might be helpful with this business with working with others. "Consciousness settles as one radiates," we don't mean in the mirror, "one radiates towards others friendliness, compassion, delight and equanimity--toward all things, whether pleasant or painful, good or bad." I'd like to stretch this out a little bit. In the *Brahmavihāras* the reason they're often referred to as the Four Divine States or Abodes is because they're associated often with the qualities of a *bodhisattva*.

This gives us a little bit of confusion. First of all a *bodhisattva*, as we have pointed to before, is one of those debonair beings that decides to hold off their own Awakening for the sake of all others. Baptist Christians have this very frequent saying, "If one of us are not free, then none of us are free." This threads through a lot of different teachings and yet it's a teaching that we can sometimes

leave aside. We go scurrying after our own Awakening as if somehow after we discover our own true nature it won't be soiled by the folks that are nearby and that tends to not necessarily be true. I mean has anyone ever experienced that? There you are in a perfect state, everything is wonderful. You've got it. You finally nailed it. You're humming along; you've got your Mai Tai and a little beach chair and it's all good. And somebody comes along and their dog thinks that right in front of you is the place to kick up sand. Or some kids go scurrying into the water and bring the entire ocean on top of you in your utter perfection.

Now, you know, maybe it's not a Mai Tai, maybe it's not on the beach, but we know what this sounds like. It sounds like our mothers and our brothers and our uncles and our bosses and our next door neighbors, for heaven's sake. Anyone. The people that live in that other country. The people that are like that, you know, they don't meditate. All of those other beings that are somehow not like you are the ones that soil your perfect, perfect life.

So, if you happen to run across this circumstance, which, maybe that's not true for you but just in case, I'm going to elaborate on those Four Abodes, those Four States so that you might have something useful. Radiating friendliness is fairly easy when other people are radiating friendliness back at you. Right? You know, you get on the bus and someone smiles at you and it's pretty easy to smile back. And you become self-congratulatory about how pleasant you are.

But how about radiating friendliness to those who are in a state of constant openness? It starts to get a little edgy when someone else is in a constant state of friendliness themselves. We start thinking, Yeah, something's not quite right. And before you know it what seemed like a perfectly reasonable thing starts to disturb us a little bit. They're friendly; I'm friendly. That's great. They're friendly; I'm friendly. Wonderful. They're friendly; I'm kind of in a bad mood today. What's going on here? It begins to irritate. Radiating friendliness towards someone that is not in a constant state of friendliness and openness themselves, but is actually in a fairly constant state of--let's just say unfriendliness; let's just say

someone that's in a fairly constant state of misery--takes us even further from our perfect pleasantries.

So really, this radiating friendliness, finding your place, finding home, abode in a place of friendliness, particularly when you find people that are always friendly and always not friendly are real practices.

Each of these abodes has near and far enemies.

The near enemies are the ways in which we confuse the teaching into being something that's not quite right. The far enemy is when we just go off the deep end in the other direction. I will tell you that for us the far enemy is obvious. It's the near enemies that are tricky, because it's the enemy--and we say "near" not just as in "they're close," but they're so close we don't recognize them. The near enemy of friendliness is undue self-affection, a kind of over self-interest and ticklishness with your own being that basically devolves into self-involvement, which disables your ability to be in relationship to what's going on around you.

So we can take radiating friendliness and be just kind of overdone with ourselves, guffawing everywhere we go. We can be over showering with affection in a way that is no more connected to ourselves and another person than, well, you know, Iraq and the United States.

Compassion has a near enemy, which is pity. We often think that if we feel bad about someone and their situation and we kind of furrow our brow that that is compassion. Nothing in us truly moves. We simply send towards them a sense that they're in a lesser position than we are, and thus they need our pity. The near enemy of compassion is pity, and we see it abound. The Dalai Lama often refers to that as being idiot compassion.

This is very, very challenging for us because we like to think that as long as we feel bad about someone's situation, though we're not inclined to do anything at all about it or, in fact, we are over inclined to do something and project our own sensibilities onto the

situation, that that makes us compassionate.

We say, I did it out of compassion. Of course, I completely brought my issues to the situation and made a mess of the thing, but I did it out of compassion. They needed my help.

Whenever you start talking about what someone else needs from you, you are probably hanging out with the near enemy of compassion, which is pity. Yes. Whenever you start becoming involved with the idea of what someone else needs from you because of what they're experiencing, you are probably hanging out with pity.

Someone needs something from you and only you can give it to them. Only you have the answer, and surely you must do this because you're compassionate. You're probably hanging out in pity. This is very tricky for us because we think, Isn't compassion being moved to action to do something for someone.

When you are telling yourself a story about what needs to happen, I guarantee you, you have left your home. Does that make sense? When you need to convince yourself, say what needs to be done, you know, get out the script about what needs to take place, you have left a centered place and gone to a place of pity instead.

The far enemy of compassion, which is fairly obvious, is cruelty, a reckless disconnection from what's going on with the people that are near and far from you. We think of cruelty as actually doing something to someone; if we do something awful then we're being cruel. Cruelty is actually a reckless disconnection.

The reason I say a reckless disconnection is because there's some situations that we don't know about--a few of them in the world--and so being able to be aware of absolutely everything is somewhat on the left side of impossible. So if we beat ourselves up or try to make ourselves connected to every little thing that's going on, we are just heading off the deep end of self-involvement again.

A reckless disconnection means that we have awareness of

something as it occurs and cut ourselves off internally so as not to feel what the situation brings, and therefore we eliminate our relationship to what's going on and that disconnect is cruel. In the big picture, it's something like this: I got an email when we reached 3,000 U.S. soldiers dead in Iraq. It was an invitation and there was going to be a ceremony to read the names of the 3,000 soldiers aloud.

I already had the feeling of discomfort creeping across me and at the very bottom of the email it said, Of course, we recognize that there are many, many thousands of Iraqis dead, and we'll hold space for them, too. And that was it. That was the end of the email. This is reckless disconnection. This is cruelty. In fact, it would've been better to not even have mentioned them, because what it caused is the need to actually shut off from that awareness in order to move forward. This was cruel. Does that make sense?

On the other hand, close by we have people that suffer great trauma or discomfort or distress in their lives. There's nothing we can do. So what we do is when we see them, we just act as if it hasn't happened. Hi, how are you, we say and we keep moving forward out of our own discomfort because we have nothing to offer. This is also reckless disconnection. Because we don't know what to do, we do nothing. Not from a place that's responsible to, Wow, I really can't do anything, but we do nothing in the sense of cutting ourselves off from the entire relationship.

So the near enemy of compassion is pity and the far enemy is cruelty. From there we are told that joy or delight is another thing that we can radiate in order to help settle our own consciousness. This joy is not friendliness. It's often translated as empathetic joy. So it actually doesn't mean your own individual joy but actually joy that comes about as recognition of someone else's success or happiness or their own joy. That also starts being a little challenging for us right off the bat. What empathetic joy is asking us to do is to recognize when other people are joyful; we should just be joyful with them. Which means that we have to put our greed aside, or jealousy aside, our self-pity aside, our poor-me why-am-I-not-in-that-situation aside. That doesn't make any of us

particularly comfortable. Now if there's someone that we know and we love, we can be joyful at their joy. So if you deepen this, what you want to do with joy is to actually discover how to find joy with people who have more than you.

When there's someone who has something that you wish you had, whether it is something material, whether it is some kind of attainment, they may have some position or they just have a state of being that you would also like to enjoy, practice empathetic joy with those people and see how far your practice takes you.

The near enemy of joy is an over effusiveness. Someone comes to you and they say, I got the new job! And you're happier than they are. You jump up and down and get kind of crazy. That's so great! I'm not feeling quite effusive enough to fake it...but you know what I mean, to be over-effusive in a similar fashion to friendliness but disconnected so that joy is coming, perhaps, from a place that is forced, that is pushed.

Obviously the far enemy of that joy is to have aversion. So when you see someone experiencing something that is positive and they feel joyful, when you yourself, move away from them that is aversion.

The last one is equanimity. In different times I have said that this is one of the few teachings that are laid out backwards. Equanimity is actually the first practice. Equanimity means to maintain a sense of balance regardless of the situation. Equanimity means to hold a place whether the situation and the relationship with other people is good or bad, pleasant or painful. Without equanimity it is actually impossible to practice the other of the Abodes.

If you cannot yourself remain in balance regardless of the situation, you cannot discover your own friendliness, you cannot discover your own compassion, you can't discover your own joy.

The near enemy of equanimity is detachment. You think of having equanimity as being Zen, no attachment to anything, and just because you're cool and detached therefore you are radiating

equanimity. On the other hand, the far enemy of equanimity is again similar, over attachment to the situation. So joy's far enemy is aversion, and equanimity's far enemy is attachment. Meaning, you get involved in people's experiences and emotions and their situations; you throw yourself into the situation.

How does any of this actually help us work with other people?

Like most of the teachings, the Four Abodes are pointing to our need to cultivate our own inner relationship in order to be in relation with others. Both the teachings of the Buddha and the teachings of the *Yoga Sutra* point to the very same thing, which is we must cultivate our own wholeness, our own sense of balance, our own internal sense of joy, compassion, and friendliness in order to be able to have that with others.

If we don't do this--not in a cave, but out there with the rest of the world--we have not a single chance of having any real relationship, because when a relationship is out of balance it simply cannot be sustained. Any relationship that has imbalance will eventually fall apart. On the one hand, one person will be resentful and on the other hand, the other person will feel disrespected.

And all relationships can go out of balance, all of them, for some period of time, but they must find balance in order to be sustained. Imbalance in relationship cannot be sustained. Imbalance in yourself cannot be sustained. If you are out of relationship with yourself, you will be out of relationship with everything and everyone around you. If you are out of relationship with everyone and everything around you, well, you know, you just might as well go home.

Does anyone have any specific questions?

**Speaker One:** What is the difference between detachment and nonattachment?

**aKw:** We get caught in the language; we'll have to forgive the language and know that we're ultimately talking about the qualities

and the essence of those things. I like to use detachment as being the thing that keeps us in disconnect and nonattachment as something that is cultivated, that enables us to be clear seers of the situation.

**Speaker One:** So there is a disconnect when you're talking about detachment?

**aKw:** I like to use it that way. Certainly you will go places and people will turn it around. So the difference between nonattachment and equanimity is really internal, and it is about whether or not what arises in you is a desire to grasp the situation whether emotionally, physically or mentally. So if you're feeling, and obviously by extension, acting on a desire to grasp after the situation, to become locked in to whatever is going on then you are attached. What we cultivate is a sense of unlocking ourselves. It's like Velcro with all those little hooks. I like to say "unhooking," and so getting unhooked from the situation, which doesn't mean leaving it just means getting unhooked.

Detachment is leaving even if your body is still there. So when Elvis leaves the building this is detachment, but when you can remain present seeing clearly and yet not glomming on to something, not becoming Velcro then you're practicing nonattachment. And let me just say that equanimity is a very, very deep practice.

I began to point to earlier, and I lost my train of thought, that one of the things about the Abodes is because they're associated with *bodhisattvas* we think of them mistakenly as states to be attained once you get there. They're practices that never end, which is why they're also called the Immeasurables. The depth of these practices cannot be measured. How far you can take them cannot be measured. There is not an end point that you get to and you're done. They are both the path and the goal. And not for just the 2,500, 2,600 years of the Buddha but likely for at least 5,000 years of the yogic practices, these have been pointed to as essential to being in relationship and essential to clearing one's consciousness of disturbance.

**Speaker Two:** Equanimity is truly a challenging, challenging one.

**aKw:** It's a bitch. You can just say it.

(laughter from audience)

**Speaker Two:** I get tangled up sometimes with being responsible even with forms of activism. I also worry about my grandchildren. And part of me says, Well, I'm attached to a certain form or way that it should be. And another part of me says, Let it be what it is.

I've heard equanimity is something you vow to do. Other people have their karma, they have their journey, they have their life and you don't interfere somehow by thinking you can change what's happening.

So I don't always know what to do, which is okay but it can be a little distressing. My heart feels so huge; I feel like I have such deep sorrow, such deep longing. It just seems like that's been my practice. I try and see what's there and try to allow what it is. I don't even know if that's a question.

**aKw:** Al Gore stole our title. The dharma should've been called an Inconvenient Truth. Really. There it is. "For those who seek liberation wholeheartedly realization is near." It is not convenient, and it is not at our behest. It's not on our time schedule. It doesn't happen when we want it to. Such is the great mystery of truth with a capital 'T.'

The discerning point of when to act...since our home here is rooted in the transformation of the society around us we want to know when do we act and when do we just let go and let God, as they say. Let it be; it's not yours. I don't have a convenient response to that, but I have a really simple one: You will know. You will know and it is unassailable. Nothing anyone can tell you will stop you. Nothing about the outcome. Nothing about the logic. Nothing about right or wrong or indifference. Nothing.

**Nothing will stop you.**

And when you need to let it be, and you know that, nothing will move you. Immoveable, solid. You will know that your place is to simply be in relationship with it as it unfolds and not move a muscle. Action only arises out of this clarity of stillness. We must get to the stillness first. We must get to the stillness first. And if we don't, always, our actions will be confused with our own grasping. Our attachment with our need to make things as we would like them to be and our view is limited, limited, limited.

In the meantime, you'll make mistakes.