

Quarrels (3 of 5) Inner Power

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Welcome to the third talk about the Buddha's teachings on disputes and quarrels.

We know that disputes and quarrels can be verbally violent. They can be assertive. A lot of power and strength can be evoked in disputes.

Some people's sense of personal power gets awakened and channeled through anger or conceit. Some people who don't have much sense of connection to their power might value being angry. It makes them feel powerful.

When our personal power is channeled into disputes and quarrels, it makes the disputes and quarrels more complicated. It is not easy for us to find ourselves in

that. There is a loss of ourselves in it. All kinds of unfortunate things can come along with this.

The Buddha says that people's love of power gives strength to any expression of greed, hatred, and delusion.

There is a sense of identifying with power – I am powerful. I want power. That kind of power, social power, has to do with power in a relationship, where we want control over others. In our arguments, we don't just want to be right, but we want to have the sense that we are powerful and we can get our way.

Sometimes this is because we believe there is only a win-lose option – either that person wins, or we win. We want to win. We want to be safe. Losing doesn't feel good. We don't want to lose. Feeling powerful is a way of winning. Being right or having a sense of control feels good. There can be pleasure that comes from the sense of power over people.

Power is often used for people to get their way. Politicians or rulers use power to get their way, and power can be expressed in all kinds of horrible ways. Because of this, power can often be seen as evil or wrong. Then people become afraid to express their power. Sometimes we are afraid that if we express our power, someone else will come along and knock it

down. They will express even more power and say that we are wrong or conceited.

The Buddha talked a lot about personal power. It was never power over anybody else. It was all about power over oneself. Occasionally, he talked about having the power to enter relationships and create healthy relationships.

The Buddha talked about developing the power of having a conscience. This power of having a conscience is to care and not cause harm. He talked about the power of confidence. We can have confidence in knowing what is healthy and unhealthy, or beneficial and not beneficial.

He talked about the power of effort. This is the effort to do what is wholesome and avoid what is unwholesome. There is the power of mindfulness. Part of the purpose of mindfulness – to be present – is not to be calm but to be able to find a way to recognize what is healthy and unhealthy, what is wholesome and unwholesome.

He spoke about the power of *samadhi*. This is the power of being grounded here in the present moment. There is the power of wisdom. One way the Buddha defines wisdom is to be able to recognize what is beneficial and what is not beneficial, what is wholesome and what is not wholesome.

Again and again, we see the Buddha wants people to have power over themselves. He wants us to have power over the choices our minds, hearts, and bodies make. We should have the power over our activities and be able to choose well.

One of the ways of choosing well is to choose the strength of mindfulness. We choose to be present without assertion and without giving up. We are present without running away or collapsing. We don't assent to things we don't agree to. We are able to calmly hold our own. In a relaxed way, we can stay and be present rather than turning away from conflict.

The Buddhist approach is to metaphorically stand up tall and keep our seat. We want to look at reality directly and calmly without flinching, collapsing, getting confused, or agitated. This is not an easy thing to do. There is an internal power that is meant to be awoken and support us in our Buddhist practice.

When this practice is only associated with being calm and peaceful, we are short-changing ourselves of what is possible. Yes, being calm, and peaceful is part of the practice, but it is a partner with strength. It is a partner with a kind of interpersonal power so that in that peaceful state we are not fragile. We are not vulnerable.

We are not so sensitive that we feel like everything is too much.

The Buddha emphasizes four powers. The first is the power of wisdom. He clearly defines this as the power to know what is beneficial and what is not beneficial. It is the power to know what is wholesome and not wholesome. He talks about the power of energy. This is the power or energy to act on that wisdom of what is beneficial and to avoid what is not beneficial.

Next is the power of blamelessness. I love this one. This is the power of living in a world where no one has any reason to blame you. Sometimes he calls this the joy of blamelessness. He also refers to it as the power of blamelessness. There is a strength that comes with being able to walk through the world feeling that no one has anything real to blame us for. They might blame us, but there is no cause for it.

Then there is the power of sustaining favorable relationships. This is the power of sustaining a favorable community. It is the power to bring people together. He describes this in four different ways. They are in a sense four sub-powers.

The first is the power of giving, as opposed to the power of taking. We give instead of taking power from others

or controlling them. The power of giving is giving people the benefit of the doubt. It is being generous to them. The power of giving is allowing people their own opinions. We can agree to disagree. You are welcome to your own opinion.

There is the power of kind or loving speech. Often in disputes and quarrels, the speech is not kind. Sometimes it is downright mean. This is the power of knowing how to speak in kind ways.

Then there is the power of beneficial conduct. This is not just knowing what is beneficial but knowing how to act.

Giving is one of those ways of acting. Kind speech is another. We stay and conduct ourselves in beneficial ways. We do not succumb to harmful ways of being.

The fourth sub-power is the power of equality. This is an impartiality where we treat everyone equally. This is the one that our society tremendously needs. There are so many ways that we have biases or prejudices towards people who are different from us. The power of treating everyone equally is a power of respect.

I offer these teachings today in the context of disputes and quarrels. They are offered to help end disputes, difficulties, and challenges we have with people. We can call upon our personal power, but don't engage in

disputes and arguments asserting power over other people. Have power over ourselves so that we know how to stay present.

The power of presence, of keeping our seat, keeping our place without succumbing, giving up, or agreeing just because the other person is seemingly more powerful. Perhaps the other person is arguing more strongly, or we feel afraid of them. Instead, we can breathe and stay rooted here. Presence is a sense of inner power that in the long term, with all the complexity of our lives, might be more important than trying to hold on to being calm and peaceful. The more that we have the power of attention, of being present or rooted, the more our calm and peace can accompany and support us.

I hope that all of us can grow into powerful people. We can grow into power over ourselves, with ourselves, so that we can do good in the world. We can become powerful enough that we can avoid the habitual tendencies to be mean, argumentative, or complain. We can avoid becoming upset about all kinds of things with other people in ways that undermine and make the world a worse place for all of us. We have the power to hold our tongue when what we are going to say will make things worse.

This practice of ours is meant to support the development of powerful, strong people who can do good in the world and good for ourselves. It is not to assert ourselves over anyone.

So, thank you. May this support us from being pulled into disputes and quarrels. May it support us when we are tempted to become involved in a disagreement. May it teach us to be present for discussions when there are disagreements without it becoming a dispute or a quarrel.

Thank you.