

Conditioned Consciousness (4 of 5)

Loving, Not Complaining

October 13, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

emptiness, awareness, sense, blaming, care, hostility, compassion, feeling, contracted, room, coagulation, capacity, tightening, kindness

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This will be the fourth talk on what I call conditioned consciousness. It is a wonderful phenomenon that, one way or another, in our waking hours (maybe other times) we are conscious, we are aware. We are conscious, aware beings. Maybe it is enough to know that. But we also have some way of constructing a sense of, or an idea about, what it is to be conscious as if something called consciousness or awareness exists. The danger of that kind of word is that we might make it into a thing and then try to discover what that thing is. Whereas, maybe it is not a thing – maybe it is more like a hologram. A hologram is kind of something, but is it a thing? Then we get caught up in issues of linguistics and definitions.

But conditioned consciousness – our sense of what it is to be conscious – has a lot to do with our states of mind and attitudes. Today I want to talk about the difference in consciousness between blaming and loving (or complaining and caring). When we spend time blaming and complaining and are caught in the grip of those states, there is a tightening and a narrowing in the mind. Often the tightening and narrowing around those states are closely connected to the sense of self.

The tightening and narrowing become a kind of lumping up, a coagulation, a condensing of a lot of different things – awareness, feelings, sensations in the body, attitudes, thinking energies – where there is a strong feeling of me, myself, and mine: the self. Blaming is often a place of contraction. This contraction is the source and origin of the strong motivation to blame and complain about things. The paradox is that this tight place of self, which can be felt experientially like a solid wall, feels fragile as if the world threatens to hit it or hurt it. But when the coagulation and contraction of self are not there, then the events of the world can still be known very clearly.

But that knowing has no weight, it has no substance, and it has no resistance. What is known just travels right through. We can still be responsible and take care of things, but the knowing does not hit anything. It doesn't reinforce that coagulated contracted sense of

self. Blaming and complaining is like a universe of self and other, conflict and tension, in which awareness gets contracted, small and tight, and filled with that tension.

As we learn to sit quietly and shed the contractions and tightness of the mind and the things we're holding on to and clinging to, then the preoccupation with complaining and blaming will quiet down. The motivation to be hostile – the sense of hostility within, which is part of the same complex – will also settle. Then awareness has a chance to be less congested with all the concerns, feelings, and the contracted sense of self that we can live under – the tight place where we are caught up in ourselves.

Our capacity to be aware, to sense and feel, becomes more and more empty of all this gunk, all this stuff. This emptiness is a fantastic thing because there is also awareness of the emptiness. Emptiness can grow and have no boundaries – it can be as big as this room, as big as a cathedral, as big as the space over the ocean. But that which knows it begins to share some of those qualities.

It is as if we construct the idea of what consciousness is from the way that we know – the way that knowing, sensing, feeling, or aware-ing is. As it becomes more and more empty, consciousness has different characteristics. The more empty it is, the more it allows

something deeper to surface and be present. I could call that something the family of love. I think we might find many spiritual traditions say something like this. In Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism, they sometimes equate deep experiences of emptiness with compassion. Somehow, emptiness and compassion arise together, or there is compassion in emptiness. The sense of emptiness they talk about is somehow coterminous with compassion or impregnated with compassion in a wonderful way.

We have the capacity to nurture others. The parental nurturing of children is a deep instinct. We have the capacity to care for the welfare of others, like a nurse who tends and cares lovingly and warmly for whoever has been wounded, hurt, or sick, maybe someone they don't even know. A sense of kindness and warmth can come with that kind of caring. As our amazing capacity for awareness grows more expansive, more peaceful, and more empty, there is room for something to surface that does not detract from the emptiness, because there is no contraction or tightening up around it, as there is with blaming and complaining.

The mind and the heart stay open. Goodwill, kindness, friendliness, care, tenderness, warmth, compassion, sympathy, empathy, and maybe plain old-fashioned love are penetrating the mind and radiating from it. One of the great benefits of deepening practice is to have this

begin to surface. In my case, my own capacity for compassion, kindness, and loving-kindness (*mettā*) was not something that I cultivated or worked at developing, but it surfaced as I matured in Buddhist practice. When there was room for it, the experience of the family of love began to emerge and grow and changed my life. I felt as if this experience was inside, waiting to come out in the open, quiet, settled space of awareness.

I would like to propose to you that complaining and complaining-like blaming (or blaming in a complaining way) is really a waste of time for you. It is actually a way to undermine yourself. In fact, all hostility undermines you. When you have it, your hostility keeps you hostage. But non-hostility frees you from captivity. Your hostility makes you a hostage. Non-hostility frees you from captivity. It is that dramatic, so check it out. If you tend to complain, and even if you complain occasionally and, by complaining, blame someone else, you are giving someone else responsibility for your happiness and your peace.

Don't be a hostage. Don't give away your peace to someone else that way. Live in your own peace. Take responsibility for it. Don't sacrifice it. If you need to take care of some problem in the world, chances are it is possible to do it better if you don't complain and you don't blame. Maybe you can do it better when you're kind, loving, caring, and compassionate. Sometimes it

is better to wait to address a problem until you have some modicum of goodwill and some decrease in blaming and hostility.

Thank you very much. May your conditioned consciousness nourish you with love.