

## Views in Practice: They Make All the Difference

**Rob:** Tonight, I would like to explore a little bit the area of views. Views in practice, views and freedom. I think they're a large part of the spiritual path for – a large part of, in a way, being a fully conscious, conscientious human being, is beginning to question, beginning to investigate, beginning to uncover the views we have.

Beginning to explore views, and also the effects they have in our life. What do we believe? What do we believe about life? What do we believe about that period moving from between birth and death? How are we seeing it? How are we looking at it? So how am I looking at life? Another level, how am I looking at this moment? And how am I looking at my practice?

At first this may seem a little abstract and, well OK, but this has, it turns out this has everything, everything, everything to do with freedom. Absolutely everything to do with freedom. The way we are looking, the way we are viewing our life, this moment and our practice.

So, the Buddha, of course, addresses the question of view, and he puts, what he calls Right View, he put that right at the base of his path. The first factor of the path, Right View, having that in place. And it's also, in a way, a culmination of the path. A goal of the path.

So, we can talk about view on just the level of the kind of philosophical, metaphysical opinions or whatever that we carry in our life. And they may be completely secular. So, whatever the current ones are – death penalty or the Euro, or some political, you know, whatever. And of course, that same range of opinions on what should or shouldn't be comes with whatever spiritual path we have.

So Buddhadhamma is full of, you know, people with opinions kind of butting heads, really. And so, views around rebirth or reincarnation, or the exact nature of the Self, whether there is a Self or whether there's not a Self. What's the place of deep concentration in the path? Is it a complete wrong direction, or is it really helpful? And so on and so on. What's the actual nature of ultimate reality? (Laughter) Small stuff!

Whether it's secular or religious, we can just see in the world, how much argument and war comes out of all this. Different opinions just butting their heads and fighting and fighting about it. And we can look at that and we hear this teaching, "don't get attached to views. Don't get attached to views."

And such a wisdom there. Such a wisdom. And how much war and bloodshed has come from this, just people having different opinions. And really when you, if you just go through history and even nowadays, around really ridiculous things. Ridiculous. So, don't get attached to views.

But even that, you know, to be a little careful, I mean, I don't know if it made the news here but a few years ago – I think it was when Haley's Comet came round again. I think so – there was a religious sect in America and they collectively committed suicide. And it was something they, something – they thought a space ship was on the comet or something. They were going to get closer to God or something. And they all wore Nike shoes. Did you hear about that? (Laughter) It was big news!

So, you know, you kind of don't get attached to views. To me that's not a helpful view. (Laughter) and the little – a few months ago, I – we were – a group of friends was sitting around and we were actually discussing the nature of ultimate reality, as one does, and I had a certain view and different people had certain views, and then it seemed to me that what was, that sort of – oh, how to put it politely? – a pash – a hearty debate! Put it, that's a nice way. (Laughter).

And it seemed to me that what – and it went on for quite a while actually. If I remember, about a day and a half. (Laughter) And I'm not exaggerating. And, what seemed to me this sort of – where people were moving towards was, "you say this, and you say this, and you say this, and it's all just views. And it's all just OK. And we can't put one ahead of another and it's all just OK."

And I didn't feel so comfortable with that afterwards actually. And I felt like, well OK, if someone asks, "Rob, you know, what's the nature of ultimate reality?" And I said, ult – what's the, you know, what's the real nature, the true nature of things, and I said, "ah, everything is a big, pink fish called Barbara!" (Laughter) It's silly, you know, it's silly to accept or use that. "My name's Brenda." (Laughter). You know, to not throw out our intelligence with this stuff. Maybe it isn't that all views are completely equal. [00.06.43]

And we also hear this teaching, and in the Dhamma tradition, we hear the teaching, "Right View is no view." And this can have a real pull on the heart, it's actually, just, we (sigh). You know, you can feel the relief of that, and the release of that, and there's something in the simplicity and the letting go. Right View is no view, and it's like, "(sigh), thank goodness. I don't have to go in to all that." But despite the heart pull, again, can we keep bringing our questioning in to this? Can we keep that integrity alive?

On one level, there is always a view. There is always a view going on. We may or may not realise it but there is always a view. There is always a way we are seeing what is happening right now. There is a way we are seeing this moment. Are we aware of the way we are seeing this moment? Most of the time we're not.

So, there's always a view, and, in Dharma teaching, it's always significant. It's never ineffectual. It's never something that doesn't affect life, affect our feelings, our perceptions. So, some – we talked, and when Catherine talked in her talk last night, very beautifully about the Self view. And we can see, you can see it, can't you? When the Self story is very strong, what's the view then? I am, I am a failure, I'm a lousy meditator, I'm a depressed person, I'm an angry person, I am this, I am that. Or you are this, you are that. And it's the Self view.

Or life is terrible. Life sucks, life is suffering. Even the Buddha said that. What is the view and how strong is it? How strongly is it operating and what is actually going on? Even to say, this is terrible. This situation is terrible. Views like that are very potent. Extremely potent. But even, I would go even a step further and say, "I am giving a Dharma talk. I am listening to a Dharma talk. There is a Dharma talk." It's all view. It's all view. It's all a way of seeing what's going on right now.

To me it's quite interesting, quite interesting to wonder what views have we absorbed from the culture. And I don't, and this really might be in the realm of opinion, but sometimes I wonder – I'm really saying I wonder. I'm not saying it is one way or another but – if that, with the sort of movement away from a religious culture that was very strong, say, medieval times, into our modern secular culture, we have replaced a sort of religious feeling and view with a kind of almost nihilistic one.

I don't know if this is true, I wonder sometimes. And there may be a prevailing sense in, for a lot of people, without even realising it, that actually, this life is it. Nothing before, nothing afterwards, complete extinction on death. No real meaning inherent in life, so better try and get as much pleasure as I can. Try and avoid as much pain as I can.

And maybe that kind of view, stemming from a kind of nihilism, is actually operating at a level that went just below the radar.

I was reading in the newspaper the other day; they did a survey just in term of views that we get from the culture. They did a survey of, I think it was 10 or 11 year olds, or children up to that age, or something. And they asked them, “what would you need to be happy? You know, what’s the most important thing to be happy?” Three most – I can’t remember the order, but the three most popular: famous, rich, good looking. You know, where did they get that? So how much are we, how much are we absorbing views from the culture? And how powerful is that influence?

So, as I said, the Buddha addressed this question, and we might say actually, if we, you know, we might say, “well, who cares what the Buddha said?” and that’s actually fair enough and fine, but he seemed to have said some quite intelligent things, so we might as well at least ask, you know, what he did say.

What is Right View? He says Right View is the Four Noble Truths. There is suffering, OK. There is Dukkha. This word, I’ll use this word suffering. What it really means is everything from the range of excruciating, physical and existential, and emotional, mental torment, all the way from that to the most subtlest, subtlest, subtlest sense of unease, dissatisfaction, not complete freedom. So, everything in that range. I’ll just use the word suffering, it’s quite a charged word. So, he said, “there is suffering.” Again, he didn’t say life is suffering, which sometimes gets translated as. “There is suffering.”

Second truth: there is cause for suffering. There is a cause of suffering. And the simple cause is when there’s grasping. When there’s either pushing or pulling. And actually, he gives a more, much more complex explanation. But the basic, the shorthand is, there’s grasping, and then because there’s grasping, there’s suffering.

Third Noble Truth: there is a release from this. There is a release and an end of suffering. And fourth: the path that he describes to move towards that end. And the path involves Right View, Right Intention, the intention towards loving-kindness, towards compassion, towards renunciation. I can’t remember the order but, Right Action, Right Livelihood. You know, how are we in the world? What are we doing with our energy? Right Speech. Right Effort, meaning that the kind of effort to develop what is beautiful and helpful to oneself and others, develop those qualities of mind and to let go of ones that are not so helpful. **[00.13.18]**

Right depth of meditation, and Right Mindfulness, sorry, and then right depth of meditation. And all this is part of the path. These Four Noble Truths. And at first, you know, we can hear that and we, kind of, like, OK, OK. And it seems maybe a little dry or whatever. the formula stick and stuff, but my experience I think it’s an experience of many people who travel the path of practice, this simple sort of formula just gets deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper and it’s much, much deeper than it will seem on the first hearing. And in a way, Buddha calls it Four Noble Truths, it’s Ennobling Truths. To have this view and to take up this view and to investigate with this view, is to ennoble the being. To ennoble the being, and it’s really that the being, and the consciousness, in a way, goes on a journey with these truths.

So sometimes we hear Dharma and the teachings go on and on and on about suffering. And, and it can get a bit much sometimes, you know. And it’s not just something that’s one way of formulating it. Oftentimes the Buddha talked about happiness. And I touched on this the other day and I’d like to, in a way, restate what I said in a way, just come at it from a slightly different angle. But, you can talk about suffering and the end of suffering, and you can talk about what brings freedom? What brings happiness? What brings a sense of wellbeing and nourishment? So, in a way it’s just the same question, the flipside of the same coin.

So, when asked this, what brings happiness? What brings wellbeing and nourishment? It’s not to think, “oh, what brings me happiness is, you know, I know that I like chocolate ice cream, whereas, as

opposed to vanilla.” It’s – we’re not talking about personal preferences here. We’re talking about universal qualities of being, that bring wellbeing, nourishment, happiness. [00.15.33]

So this question, what brings happiness, is part of Right View. It’s very much part of Right View. But it’s a kind of long-term, long-term view. So, happiness in the moment may not be possible. Maybe there’s just too much difficult stuff going on. The most we can hope for is a kind of ease or peace with what’s going on.

But as a long-term view, building, building, what it is that will lead to this nourishment, this deep sense of wellbeing. So, it’s a long-term agenda of practice. And can we – if, you, happiness is a charged word. Can we just admit the possibility that that might be possible in the long-term, to move towards cultivating the qualities that have happiness as their fruit?

It’s an interesting word, you know, some people really are – they have the kind of personality and being that they really do experience ecstasy and bliss and overflowing joy. You know, and perhaps it’s not as uncommon as we think. I don’t know how common it is really; actually, I have no idea what the percentages are (laughter). I know one teacher did a survey, anyway...

And some people, they’re just, the nervous system is not wired that way. And that’s fine. It’s completely fine, but I think, for everyone there’s a possibility of a quiet sense of wellbeing. Just a quiet sense of happiness. Nothing dramatic. No fireworks. Just that quiet sense of wellbeing. And, again, not all of the time.

The Buddha goes into this, what is it that’s leading to happiness? And he talks, you know, absolute foundation, Sila. You know, taking care of how we are with other people, just as we mentioned, implicit in the Eightfold Path. Really taking care of that and looking into that.

Part of what happens as we progress through the path is we actually become more and more sensitive to this realm of Sila. More and more sensitive to when we’re not acting out of love, out of care and concern.

So, the other day I was speaking to a friend and she was joking and then – and she was kind of acting like someone being derogatory. So, she wasn’t even being derogatory, she was just kind of joking that way. And we were just there and it suddenly felt really painful. Not really painful but just there was some, mmm. That really didn’t feel good. And we talked about it, and she, she actually said, “oh well, I remember when I was doing much more practice years ago, I would have actually felt that, and now I’ve become less sensitive.”

And, you know, it was fine for her. She was just saying that but, to realise that a part of what goes on in meditation practice is sensitivity that we develop to Sila. To how we are and what we’re putting out in to the world. And it’s hugely important.

So, the Buddha talks about, what qualities – you know, always the question is, “what qualities are going to lead to a sense of wellbeing? A sense of happiness?” and there’s these lists, as I said the other day: generosity, you know, hugely important; renunciation; calmness; collectedness. And sometimes it can be very attractive to hear teachings of nothing, nothing to make happen, nothing to develop, nothing to cultivate etc, nowhere to go. And that’s, you know, in a way that’s true and there’s a real, again, heart pull for that kind of teaching.

When I was talking to someone a little while ago and they were saying how attractive that had been for them, and they sort of went off for a couple of years and stopped meditating and all this. Then they just noticed after a while, actually, I’m just much happier when I pr – when I meditate. So, there’s just, are

we, can we make this an experiment and actually be honest with ourselves and not just get attracted to the views that may feel good?

So, this notion of all we have to do is be with what is, a hugely beautiful teaching, a hugely important teaching, a lovely teaching. But can only ever be part of the path. So, we talk about being with what is and we also talk about letting go. We talk a lot about letting go. But the capacity to let go is helped so much, so much by what we have cultivated in the way of beautiful qualities

The more that reservoir of wellbeing and happiness the more things just – it's just easier to let go. And I see this over and over as a teacher. Over and over with people, and with myself, you know, in my own practice. I was – someone came in the other day, not on this retreat, little while ago and she'd been practicing for twenty years, and had – beginning to feel just quite like, this is just the same old stuff over and over. Twenty years. And she had put a lot of emphasis on two things. One was this just accepting what is. Just being with what is. And the other was very deep teachings about emptiness. She had a very bright mind and she kind of understood and... But somehow it hadn't made much difference. And this whole aspect of cultivation, as we were talking, had not been something she'd paid really much attention to at all. And in a way, it got, it took that level of frustration to think, "mmm, maybe there's something there."

So, to me, letting go, freedom etc, the path, it's like a bird with two wings; the cultivation and the being with what is and the investigation. Only one of those, it's not, you know, bird is not going to get off the ground. [00.21.47]

So, first part of Right View, first part, a question: do I know, do I really understand what leads to happiness, what leads to wellbeing, what leads to a sense of nourishment? Do I know that, really? Am I sure about that? And am I cultivating it? First part of Right View. Do I admit that these kind of developments are even possible? So that's part of the view. Do I admit that they're possible?

So, that's one part of Right View, Buddha placed huge emphasis on that. And it's, in a way we could say, like a longer-term view. So generally, in one's life, with all the ups and downs etc, moving towards building these qualities. Hugely, hugely significant, to be able to have two wings and to be able to get off the ground and fly.

What about views in the moment? So less long-term, in the moment. Right View, in a way to me, Right View, this Four Noble Truths business, it's like, it's the view of practice. It's the view that practice is possible. It's the view that freedom is possible. That some degree of freedom is possible with what's going on right now.

So, what do I mean? In our life – here it's a very precious environment here. We have nothing to do but look at what's going on. Nothing to do but examine our experience. In our busy lives, things happen and they happen at very inconvenient times and in very, you know, difficult ways. And that's the nature of our life. How often is it that the situation just seems to need addressing. You know, I need to fix this thing. I need to get my car fixed. I need to sort out my living situation. I need to – my money situation, my – whatever it is. You know, and just – those things that become important to us, that have become important to us.

When something's difficult in a situation, how easy, how often is it that we go to, I just need to, I just need to fix it. I just need to, I just need to sort out my money. I just need to sort out a living situation. I just need to sort out, you know, whatever it is. And that becomes a priority. Address – you know, of course it's important; those things are important. You know, of course they are. To address them and to change what needs to be changed, and all that.

But, how often does that become the priority? And the notion of “how can I see this differently? How can I move towards freedom?” takes way, way back step. You know, back stage. It happens all the time. So, so easily and so without our even realising it.

So, Right View. How am I looking at this situation? This situation that seems difficult. This moment that seems difficult. How am I looking at it? What’s my view of it? Am I making the possibility of practice, of freedom, a priority? Is that there in my view?

And, you know, when things are difficult, when the housing is difficult and the relationship is difficult, and the money is difficult and, you know, all that, and this is what we go through, you know. The body is, you know, having difficulties and illness and... What again, what’s in the culture? And even in, you know, what’s being offered from our friends. You know, of course to support and empathise and find ways to fix that. Hugely important that we have empathic friends and that we offer that to others, but is that all that’s being offered?

Or is there a voice, inside or outside, that’s saying, “how can I look at this differently? How can I practice with this? How can I see this so that it moves towards freedom?”

So, things break in the world. You know, things, physical things break, our bodies break. Our cars break. Things we use break. Relationships break. All of this. If when things break we just see hassle, “oh no, hassle,” how, what happens then? Or are we seeing in a different way, seeing: that’s the nature of things. It’s the nature of things to break. Anicca. What I talked about the other day, anicca.

And, with the anicca there’s a whole different view. Not that this thing should not break, it should be there for my – make things convenient so I can, whatever, do whatever I need to do. But maybe another view. It’s breaking. Yes. This world, these things, this world is – it’s not my home. It’s not my home. The universe is not created or set up to make Self happy and contented and to have everything work out the way Self wants it to be. It’s just not set up that way. That’s not the deal.

Maybe what’s a little bit, you know – we try though, to set things up so that they, so that they go exactly the way Self wants them. And maybe what’s a little bit different nowadays is that we have technologically and sociologically etc, we have much more of a capacity to actually do that than they did way back. We can actually get quite close to sort of engineering this illusion that everything will just run along smoothly. And you know, suiting me. **[00.27.46]**

But nothing is certain, nothing is certain. So, all that stuff: car, house, body, relationship – just the other day a friend went in for a routine medical exam and got – the doctor called: “sorry, some abnormal cells came up. Can you please come in for more tests?” And then the wait and then the follow up test, and this period of time just not knowing.

One of my teachers, Ajahn Thanissaro, used to say, “ageing, sickness and death,” which we are all subject to, what the Buddha called ageing sickness, death, he used to say, “they play hard, and they play for keeps.” Are we practicing? Are we practicing? Because that’s the stuff we’re going to have to practice with. This body is going to decay. Our loved ones are going to decay. They’re going to die. We’re going to die. Are we practicing? Are we – have we got a momentum of practice that when, you know, when it gets really bad we have a way of looking, we have ways of looking?

So, another question, part of Right View: what actually is my view right now? What is my view right now? Of this situation, of this moment, of whatever. And is it a view that’s leading to freedom? ‘Coz if I view this thing breaks, it’s a hassle, it’s a whatever, that’s not helpful. If I view it – can I view it another way that’s actually leading to freedom? Realising something different.

So, the Buddha talks also about ways of looking. Ways of looking that he encourages that actually lead towards freedom. And he talks about looking in terms of what's called the Three Characteristics. The Three Characteristics. So, these are impermanence, un-satisfactoriness and not-self.

Viewing things as impermanent, seeing that fact like what I talked about the other day. Just seeing impermanence, seeing the impermanence of things. So, when it breaks it's anicca, not hassle, not Oh no! It's anicca, that's what we're seeing. And seeing that, like I said, that the world is not set up this way. Things are not set up this way. There is an uncertainty there. There is an un-satisfactoriness there.

It's interesting, you know, sometimes when this goes out, and even from some teachers it's almost like, hear about the Three Characteristics, there's something that should make us quake and tremble and feel really bad and depressed and have this kind of existential angst. To me it's something very different. It's a way of, what the – I feel, that the Buddha was interested in was looking, using these Three Characteristics as lenses, because there's a freedom that comes from that. There's a letting go that comes from that. And something very lovely, a very lovely sense of freedom comes. And the not-self that Catherine talked about last night. What would it be to be in the world and be in this existence and move through the world, and really not have a view of ownership of anything? Or identification with anything? A house, a home, anything at all. Body. Completely – thought – radically different way of being in the world.

So, nothing whatsoever should be clung to as I or mine. That's the Buddha's encouragement to start seeing in a different way.

So, with this Right View, right questioning, again, it's not really: is there a Self or is there not a Self? Buddha actually wasn't interested in that question. It's more: can I view this moment, this experience, this whatever is coming up as not-me? Not-mine? Not-me, not-mine. This sensation in the body, this Vedana, this emotion, this thought. This hand that I'm looking at, this apartment that I live in. This car, these clothes. Can I start looking at things and seeing not-me, not-mine? And, begin actually practicing that way of looking. It's really a practice. To start practicing a certain way of looking because it leads to freedom.

Sometimes when people hear this, they're a bit turned off because there's such an attraction to wanting to be with things as they are. Or not do anything, not manipulate experience in any way. But the truth is that we're manipulating experience all the time. Because this "I, mine, me, mine" goes on all the time. Sometimes we're conscious of it, and sometimes we're not. That's something we're adding to experience. My this, my that. Or certainly in the terms of story – you can see it on the level when the story gets very strong, we're adding that. But it's even more subtle than that. We're just adding me and mine to experience all the time. What would be to actually do less and say not-me, not-mine. Just unhook that.

So, Four Noble Truths, in a shorthand kind of way of looking, again it's a kind of lens to look at experience. Is there suffering right now? OK, I feel some discontent. I feel some dis-ease. I feel some contraction. There must be some grasping around. OK. When there's suffering, it's alerting me. There's some grasping. Some push or pull, a struggle with what's going on. Can I relax that? And recognise that it's possible to be free by relaxing that grasping.

So, it's almost like a very, you know, shorthand kind of way of, way of seeing the Four Noble Truths. Shorthand lens of looking at experience. Is there suffering? OK. Where's the grasping? Look for it. See what you can find. And then is it possible to relax that? **[00.34.50]** So, to go through the meditation or the day, life, looking at it this way.

As I said, the Buddha, when he talked about the second Noble Truth, it's not just grasping, it's actually quite more complicated than that. And we can even, as practice deepens, begin looking in a much more full way, and have a much more full understanding. All the subtle factors in the mind and the heart that are actually leading to building suffering in the moment. So what are they? What would they be? Begin really honing in that way and looking that way. What are the subtle factors that are building suffering. Actually, building the very way things appear, or their appearance themselves. So maybe that sounds abstract right now. [inaudible]

Another question that's involved in Right View: what am I putting into the present moment that's leading to suffering? What am I putting into the present moment that's leading to suffering? So, this is not – when we feel some suffering and some contraction or some difficult emotion or whatever, it's not a tool to deny the influence of the past and how of course that influences the present. But if we look carefully and really honestly, suffering needs some input in the present. It needs us to be seeing or doing or putting something in or reacting in a certain way for suffering to happen in the present.

Without that present moment input, no suffering. So not to, again, not to believe me just because I'm saying it, or any other teacher, but just to explore this. Without present moment input, there is no suffering. Sometimes we're sitting in meditation or in our life or whatever, and we can feel like something's really coming up, you know, a difficult emotion or something's coming up and it feels like it's coming up, it's bubbling up from the past. And there's a lot of feeling with that and maybe some very difficult emotions, some grief or sadness or anger or contraction or whatever it is.

And there's the pain of that and we feel that and every encouragement to be with that. And then it moves through and it feels like it's released. And then it's gone and we feel lighter. Ah! And it really feel like, something purified there. Something came up and it went out.

On one level that's true. On another level, is there something in the present that I'm putting in that's actually creating that whole experience? That maybe there's actually no such thing as things coming up from the past. It just seems that way, notion of purification. It just seems that way. At one level, it's very useful to work at that level and that sense. But as one goes deeper, to really ask, very, very, probing questions. Is that really what's going on?

So, as I said, practice can never be just being with things as they are. It can never just be that. Beautiful as that is, and that the beautiful intimacy with experience, with life, that comes from that can only ever be just a part of the practice.

A little while ago, I was – how do I put it – I went to see someone and, not really a close friend, and also not someone I'm in a teaching relationship with. And she was having a very hard day that day and she was quite upset and we were talking, and she explained a little bit what was going on and she explained the difficulty she was having in a relationship with her boyfriend at the time. And she explained how, you know, she would say *this* and he would understand *that* and they – she thought they had agreed *this* and he thought they'd agreed *that* and basically this suffering.

Then at the end, knowing that I was involved in the Dharma etc she said, "I know, I know Rob, I know, I've just got to be with it. I just have to be with it." And I didn't actually say anything at the time 'coz I wasn't in a teaching relationship with her but, I actually thought, actually no that's not what's needed here. What's needed is looking at, how is this suffering being – how is this suffering being built? By miscommunication. By not agreeing on understandings together. By not, you know... It's not just a matter of being with things, being with things, being with things; it's actually looking at how suffering is getting built.



And a little while ago here someone was on retreat, a few months ago I think it was, a month or something. And I think it was quite a full time at Gaia House, I think so, and a lot of people had colds as well. And he was coming in to the hall, meditating and practicing diligently, and was sitting next to someone with quite some coughing, you know. And finding himself getting really irritated with this person that, you know, disturbing his meditation.

And there was suffering. Notice, this is suffering, this is suffering. This relationship I have to what's going on is suffering. I feel it. And very wisely, I thought, began looking in that practice period, "how can I see this differently? How can I see this differently that takes the suffering out of it?" and he began using the reflective mind and remembering.

And this person was coughing and fidgeting and stuff. And just remembering, "oh yeah, I used to be like that. I used to be very restless and unable to sit still." And then this separation that had come in that was, you know, building the suffering, just, he just saw the common humanity, "Oh yeah, I used to be exactly the same. And only because I've been practicing longer that I'm able to be a bit more still."

Saw the humanity and the suffering went out of it. And love came, and love began to flow there. So, are we practicing this kind of investigation, this kind of intelligence? So, when we say, what am I putting into the present moment, it can be extremely subtle. This goes subtler and subtler and subtler. So, if we take up the thing that Catherine talked about last night, this not-self, what happens – you may have noticed this already on the retreat – what happens when there's a lot of self-story about something? It really – the mind is just spinning with proliferation of self-story.

And then we see that. We see, oh I don't have to do that. And somehow it just goes, the self-story goes. What happens to the experience of what's going on? The experience actually lessens in intensity. What happens to experience if I begin to look at it, look at this moment and what's happening, through the lens of not-me, not-mine?

It begins to fade, its intensity fades, its prominence and consciousness fades. What happens if I completely let go of all self-identification? Not even identified with awareness. So, I'm not – self is not building any story, it's not identified with anything at all, including awareness.

The degree of impression or intensity of something happening depends on how much Self there is. How much self-view there is at that time. If there's no self-identification at all, things actually completely fade from experience, they completely fade. They disappear. They cannot sustain themselves if there's really truly at that moment no self-identification.

So, obviously, I'm aware this is probably not most people's experience right now, but I just want to point a little bit, where the practice is going. Potentially anyway. Point out some possibilities 'coz I think it's – I do feel it's important to point out what the possibilities are.

If how things appear, or whether they appear at all, depends on whether I have a self-view. When there's this much self-view they appear this way. When there's this much they appear this way. When there's none at all, they maybe don't appear at all. Which is the real amount? Which is the real amount of the way things are? Which is "things as they are", this phrase that's so lovely, and, you know, we're so fond of. Which is things as they are? Which amount of Self is the real amount of Self through which to look at experience?

Self-view, any kind of self-view is a builder of experience. It's a bui – it's what the Buddha called exactly that, a builder of experience. A view of Self builds our experience. So where does all that – what does all that mean? Where does it... **[Audio cuts out 00.44.46]**

“Follow no paths. All paths lead where? Truth is here.” And I remember reading that as a teenager and feeling very, “ah, that’s, you know, right on. That’s lovely.” (Laughter) That was actually what I...

But again, are we really interested in truth? Are we really interested in truth, and not just this nice feeling of what might feel nice? So, it has this heart-pull, but what this teaching, if we’re really following this question of view and Noble Truth, and the Noble Truths, there’s no “here” either. Truth is here, but there is no here. I can’t find it. **[Audio cuts out 00.45.44, dictation repeats itself as above from “Follow no paths”]** What is here? Here is completely not existing independent of the view I have of it. There’s no here. No now. That’s also just a concept that depends on view. No here, no now. And that’s not to say that truth is *there*, some other *there* either.

Again, sometimes we have notions of nowhere to go, nothing to do. And again, that’s really lovely, and it can really speak to us. At certain junctures of the path it can be actually very liberating. Very healing and very helpful to hear that. Nowhere to go, nothing to do. Thank goodness. And it can actually open a lot and open the heart a lot. But how much integrity do we have of the ongoing journey? Of the questioning? **[00.47.41]**

So, it is true, ultimately speaking, there is nowhere to go and nothing to do. But, for most people, what that means is, hearing that, nowhere to go, nothing to do, and we come back to, what? Me, here, with the world as it is with emotions and thoughts and feelings. And that’s not true either. That’s not – we’re giving the world and the Self a kind of reality which it doesn’t have. So, our view has not gone deep enough at that point.

Another, sort of one that we can feel very attracted to: just want to be. Don’t want to do. Being versus doing. So much doing in the world. Just want to be. And again, you know, can be hugely helpful and important. But, if we’re really following, we see the subtlest view, the subtlest view at all is a kind of building of experience. And building is doing.

So, this whole duality between being and doing turns out to be a complete non-event really. It’s just, it’s not real. And again I – not probably here, people who come on retreat, but sometimes one meets people and they say, “I’m not really into meditation. Relationship is my path.” Or parenting is my path, or dancing is my path, or, you know, I play the cello, or whatever.

And all these things – beautiful, beautifully, beautiful parts of human existence, you know, really lovely. Potentially, some of it anyway. (Laughter) Some of the time. And sometimes even in the midst of this dancing, or, you know, whatever it is, making love and playing music or whatever, sometimes even the Self disappears. And we say, “Yea that’s really spiritual [inaudible], you know.”

But, can this activity, whatever it is we’re taking as a path, can it lead to that same understanding that I just talked about? That it’s all empty? It goes beyond. It’s this agenda – practice does have an agenda. You know, it does have an agenda. And it’s to understand that. And can what I’m taking to be practice, can it take me to that level or not? And if it can’t then, well, you know, it may be a lovely part of existence but it basically won’t do as a sort of ultimately deep practice.

So, Right View. Buddha talks about Right View. One way of stating that, and it’s going to sound maybe quite strong, I don’t know. If there is suffering, if there is dukkha, discontent, it means I am actually seeing with ignorance right now. If there is suffering it means I am seeing wrongly. And that may sound pretty hardcore. I think it is pretty hardcore.

And I don’t mean it in any judgmental way and of course, not for a second to abdicate ourselves from responsibility for what goes on in the world in terms of economic and social conditions of others etc.

“Oh well, they just need to view it differently, [inaudible] you know.” Not at all saying that for a second.

But at a whole other level in terms of our practice, when there's suffering, it means that we're looking wrongly. So, I remember Joseph Goldstein, one of the senior teachers, saying, I think it was years ago, I remember him saying, “when there's suffering, that kind of tweaks my interest. That's when I...” (laughter) You see, you have to – I've quite, I've done quite a lot of practice, for me at that point. It's like, “oh no”. (laughter).

But I remember him saying, I think it was quite a long time ago. I don't remember even where it was but, when there's suffering, it's like, the suffering, it's telling me, “ah, I need to look at something differently. I need to see it differently.”

So, the question, again, the question of Right View: what do I need to understand about how suffering arises? What do I need to understand about that? How is suffering being built in the present? How is suffering being built? And is it possible to remove some of the builders? You know, like – I don't know the name of it. That game where you put sticks, you know, and you build a thing and then you pull – or a house, a house of cards, you know. Suffering is being built like that and we can just remove some of the things. [00.52.32]

So, I don't know, maybe all that sounds very complex, too. I don't know, maybe it does. But again, you know, another view that can creep in or that we can feel very attracted to... truth is so simple, and we love the simplicity, and it's a relief because often our lives are very complicated.

Some people are really attracted towards complexity and they want all this Buddhist psychology and theories and Abhidhamma and all this. Most of us are hungering for a kind of simplicity. And we feel very attracted to simplicity and the beauty of that. But maybe the truth is not complex and not simple. Maybe those are just our particular preconceptions or desires, and has nothing to do – it's not even in that realm.

We might say, “truth is beyond concepts. It's beyond concepts, so let's just ditch concepts.” But what happens if we ditch concepts too early, is we just end up with the same old default concepts. Self, world, thing, emotion, time, thought, you know, all of it, me, you, here, there. So, to me one of the huge, really profound skills of the Buddha, was to take a few concepts and say, “pick up these concepts, use these concepts, ‘coz they will lead to freedom.” They are concepts that lead to freedom and they also lead beyond concept. They lead beyond themselves. It's an enormously skilful teaching when you really start to see that happening.

So, these Four Noble Truths, that view has the capacity of really, really leading to a completely radical, radically different understand of things. Completely something utterly, utterly radical, this understanding of emptiness. And even has the capacity to transcend itself. So, goes beyond notions of a path. Goes beyond notions of time, or goes beyond notions even of suffering and freedom. Completely goes beyond itself.

So, the Buddha did say, actually, something like, “one who has seen emptiness has let go of all views.” Has let go of all views. One who has seen emptiness. But it's not to let go too early. ‘Coz there are views, Four Noble Truths, that kind of view that's actually leading towards freedom, and to ask ourselves, are my views leading toward freedom?

And the Buddha does talk, you know, many of you are familiar with the analogy of letting the raft go once one has reached the other shore. But, not too early.

Shall we sit quietly together for a minute? **[End of audio]**