



In this talk, I'd like to speak about two aspects of the emptiness of “selfie” existence, which will include the workplace as one subject and time as the other—past, present, and future. Both of these are of great importance to us. Let's talk about the workplace.

Some people, a high percentage of people, are employed. You may be one. You may go to work early in the day and stay through the whole of the day. You may be working in the business world, the corporate world. You may be in the public sector working for the government, working for social services, and of course you may be self-employed, or you may be a boss with a small or large team. There has and continues to be, over the years, an explosion of interest in humans' relationship to work. There's important exploration taking place.

If one is to bring in an authentic dharma perspective into this relationship, then it will necessarily be very, very challenging. It needs and requires from us a large remit. As an example, there are a growing number of people with a range of skills who are going into the workplace—the public and the private sector—offering coaching, training, counseling, mindfulness courses, and more. This person goes into the work environment. She or he offers a program, and in the offering of the program the staff genuinely can feel some benefit. A key theme, as we know, is stress and the reduction of stress. The difficulty with this theme is how easily the self takes the view, once again, that “I am creating so much stress for *myself*.” Is it a self-created event? I'm not sure. I have a very strong doubt about it. So firstly, let me mention what I would regard as stress. There are three primary reasons for it.

One is very, very simple: thinking too much. If we keep thinking too much about whatever it might be, the excess of thought will generate some stress in the mind. For example: I don't own a car, but when I did own a car, an old car, sometimes after turning the engine off it would keep running—*hum hum hum*—for a few minutes before it would cool off. Sometimes our mind is like that, when we're thinking far too much. We put the



head down on the pillow, and, like the old car, our mind is churning over. We can't get to sleep.

A second cause of stress is desire and fear. The desire, a common one in the workplace, is to get things done. The fear is not getting them done and the consequences of not getting them done. So there's a collision of desire and fear. When those two forces in the inner life collide with each other, what's going to happen? It's going to create stress.

The third kind of stress that arises is through an attitude. That attitude of mind may be negative. The attitude of mind may be resistant: "I don't want to do this. I don't like doing this. It's not good for me. Why should I have to do it?" That attitude, with its attendant feelings and emotions (let's say there's some issues going on at home or from the long time past) gets into the heart, gets into the mind, gets into thought, gets into the body, and the body begins to feel more exhausted. The posture begins to slump. Stress is building up from too much thinking. Fear and desire are colliding with each other, and a kind of attitude of mind, which is stress-making, arises. So the good people who go into these businesses, corporations, public service organizations, etc., offer some practical, helpful, and supportive practices to reduce the stressed-out self.

From a dharma perspective, it's to be recognized that there are deeper issues taking place. One is the environment people are working in. In an environment where bosses are saying to the management and staff, "We need more efficiency, we need you working longer hours, and we need you to help us achieve the company targets"—usually financial and production targets—you've got efficiency, you've got long working hours, and you've got certain targets to achieve. You think a person who hears that five days a week won't feel stressed?

So environmental demands upon a person contribute to the stress. But if the self thinks, "It's all about me and my stress; I'm just making my own stress for myself," she or he is not looking at dependent arising, not looking at the causes and conditions that are taking



place outwardly and inwardly, not viewing them together, and not recognizing the dynamic *generating* the stress. That would require a fearless and courageous voice (because the job may be at risk) to speak up and ask, "Why do we have to live and work in such a pressure-cooker situation? Surely, there are more intelligent ways of living."

The other, also from the dharma perspective, is that ethics are essential. Therefore, it's not only about efficiency, production, achieving goals, and higher income, but it's also about one's relationship to the environment and to what one is producing. It's about our relationship to the lowest paid among us. It's a relationship about finding our voice and expressing our concerns. It's a relationship about a healthy social environment in which to work.

If one starts to bring in that bigger picture, then it's not so much about self, *I, me, my*, but about the conditions that arise and produce events. Some people, plenty of people, are engaged in beautiful, significant, and valuable work, and it's healthy—environmentally healthy, socially healthy, healthy for the animals and much else. It's not easy to do though. There is still stress in those fields but also sharing, kindness, and listening to each other.

We're not taking a view of mindfulness practice as just about being in the moment: it's not. It's not just about being in the moment or being non-judgmental. It's about the exploration of life. It's about applying mindfulness, inner and outer, as the Buddha clearly instructed in teachings, to see the causes and conditions there, and seeing what wise, skillful steps we can take. Only then can change can come about for the welfare of all, from the lowest paid workers to the bosses and all those in-between.

The second area—which is equally important—is seeing that being in the moment or accepting what is in the moment is too small a vision of life and is not what the teachings are about. They never were about just taking that kind of view. Rather, they are about recognizing our relationship to time. That relationship to time is a relationship to three



fields: past, present, and future. So if something is arising in the present moment, in the here and now, and it requires some recognition, it's not just about being in the moment as some kind of answer to our prayers. It's saying, "Okay. This has arisen. It didn't come from nowhere. What are the causes and conditions that brought this about? What are the changes that are needed?" When one starts to apply this, we forget "being in the moment" and become willing to direct mindfulness as the Buddha clearly instructed. "What led up to this? What is it that I didn't see, that I ignored, that I neglected, that I disregarded? What are the changes that are needed?"

In regards to the future, the Buddha doesn't say "there's no past and no future, there's only now." This is a contemporary ideology. There is a recognition of the three fields of time. In that recognition, you, I, and all human beings, *any* sentient beings, engage in some kind of planning for the future. We have to be extremely mindful in the way that we look to the future. There are some that look to the future and put hope into it. In some places, like in the United States, sometimes it almost looks like a political belief system to have hope in the future—change and hope. But hope carries the shadow. Hope carries the potential for the hopeless, for the crash, for the disappointment. And so we can be building up this idea of hope and when it doesn't emerge then there's a disappointment.

The other is fear. Can we look towards the future to see what causes and conditions being cultivated in the present contribute to health and skillfulness in the future? In this way, we are freed from the imprisonment of hope and fear. Can we see the present in relationship to the future in this way? It can be on the personal level, it's important there, but also on the global level. There are areas and actions that unfortunately, most of our politicians ignore but that people in the grassroots engage in, to have long-term vision. They look ahead of the rest of the country. That vision, free from hope and fear in its relationship to the present, generates the action.

Ideally, we bring mindfulness to the past, we bring it to the present, we bring it to the future, and we are willing to make judgments about it to see what the changes are. That

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brings the best out of a human being. It is a liberating movement. We're not trapped in the box of just “being in the now.” Thank you.