

Anushka Fernandopulle  
*The Dharma of Leadership*  
Week Four: “Adopting a Lifestyle of Integrity”  
March 26, 2018



Hello, and welcome back to the series on leadership and dharma. This is Anushka Fernandopulle again and here we're in the fourth video. In this video, we're going to talk about leadership and integrity. To recap what we've done in the past: we talked about dharma as nature and about learning to live in alignment with natural law. We talked about what some of those aspects are as well as how they connect to leadership in a complex, changing, and adapting world.

We also talked about some of the characteristics that people have said that they look for in a leader. I'm putting the top ones as being honest, inspiring, forward thinking, and competent. We can actually cultivate several of those characteristics of the heart and mind through practice, thus allowing us to manifest our leadership more in the world.

Again, as we begin this video, I invite you to ground yourself from your busy day or whatever it is you've been doing. You can take a deep breath in and as you exhale, just allow yourself to sink into your seat. Feel the connection in your groundedness, your connection to the chair, to the floor. Sense the body breathing again. Allow your attention to collect all the places it's been. Allow your body to relax. Allow your shoulders to relax. Allow the muscles in your face to relax. If you want to pause the video to practice a little bit more you can, or you can just continue.

In the last video, you were given an exercise in collecting your attention and mindfulness five different times during the day. I'll encourage you to continue with those practices. This kind of practice can be very beneficial; it gives back what may seem like more moments of your time.

For most of us there are periods of time, and you may observe this, when you're present and you can be clear. Then there are periods of time in which you're kind of lost in thought or daydreaming, lost in the past or worried about the future, and then you'll come back again and be



present. For most people, that's how we operate. When something happens, you only get a few opportunities to deal with that, to make a change.

For example, suppose this mug [holding a mug] is on a surface on a table and then it's like this [starting to fall over]. You get one picture [of the mug]. Then you miss, miss, miss, miss [capturing photos of the mug]. Then you get one picture when it's off the table. It's falling. Then you get one picture where it's crashed on the ground, the water spilled and that's it. Then you think “How can I fix that? I just saw it.” It was sitting on the table, next thing you know, it's falling, and then it's finished.

What if you actually got 100 pictures? You got this picture here [of the mug before it falls]. Then you got [*camera click noises*] all the way down, so you actually got 100 pictures. That gives you 97 more opportunities to do something about it. This is kind of like what happens if we cultivate this presence, if we cultivate collected attention, we get back all those pictures in between. We get back those moments as opposed to “Oh look, there's a cup. I wonder if I need to go to the grocery store.” [*sound of the cup falling*] “Oh no, that cup is falling. Why do these things always happen to me?” [*sound of the cup falling*] Gone. This can provide encouragement to continue to cultivate this sense of presence and just keep coming back with patience and a sense of kindness.

Don't criticize yourself if it seems like you're lost a lot. The first thing we learn when we practice mindfulness is that we're actually less mindful than we thought. That's okay—that's natural.

This aspect of kindness is related to the topic that we're going to talk about today, which is about leadership and integrity. Integrity means wholeness of the heart. [It's about] acting in a way that we can feel happy about later without regrets, or acting in a way that we would like to be treated. For most of us, if we have been subject to a leader who acted without integrity, it's something that we feel and know. In the last video, I asked you to think about leaders you know who were



exemplary and who you admired. Positive qualities like integrity, honesty, or trustworthiness probably came up.

If you think about leaders you've encountered personally or in the larger sphere of the world that you think are not good leaders, often times that person wasn't ethical, they lacked integrity, or they weren't honest. Truly, a critical foundation in being a good leader is to have honesty. I think it's also about being able to inspire trust in people, or to inspire them to take chances, feel courageous, or feel like they're held in high regard.

We can also talk about this as a gift that we can give people. My tradition of Buddhism often talks about giving people the sense that they have nothing to fear in your presence; such an effect is among the greatest gifts you can give. If people feel like, “Oh, this is someone trustworthy. I don't have to feel like you're going to physically attack me, lie to me, be creepy with me sexually, or try to steal things from me. Your mind is steady, so yeah, I feel like I can rely on you to act in a way that is wholesome.” This is a great gift that you give to others and it's also a gift that you give to yourself.

We can train in cultivating this quality. Basic training consists of paying attention to the ways we act and speak in the world. But underneath all of that, we can reveal what's being cultivated in the mind. By paying attention, we can see the times that we are acting out of fear or contraction. This is a critical aspect in the path of development.

These trainings are like taking a vow to pay attention to certain areas of your life and to do your best to act in a wholesome way. There are five of them. The first one is: “I undertake the training to refrain from physically harming or killing living beings.” This includes not killing animals or being involved in a career that involves the habitual killing of animals. Along with that, we vow not to physically harm other living beings, but instead we can take a vow to protect living beings when we have the opportunity to do so. There are many times when there's someone who is more



vulnerable than us. We're not being attacked by someone but we can see someone being attacked or bullied, physically or in some other way. Can we then take a chance to see what the best way would be to provide safety for this other being? Cultivate courage and integrity in this way.

The second vow is: “I undertake the training to refrain from taking that which is not offered.”

The first vow highlights for us when there are moments of aggression or violence that arise within us. This one highlights for us when there are moments of greed or acquisitiveness that arise, particularly in relationship to something that is not ours. All of us have had the experience of having something taken from us at times that we didn't want it to be taken from us. This happens on a larger scale in the environment as well.

This does not create the kind of ground from which people can flourish. What are times in which this urge to have something that's not actually offered arises within you? Ask yourself, “Can I pay attention to that? Can I take the vow to refrain from that?” Cultivating generosity with those around us is the opposite of feeding greed and desire. Renunciation, letting go of that which is not necessary, is also a helpful method of training.

The third training focuses on sexual activity, so it says: “I take the training to refrain from sexual misconduct or harmful sexual behavior.” This has been in the news a lot lately. There has been sexual misconduct in a lot of workplaces, and it's created an environment where women, and sometimes others, have not been able to succeed or thrive. These are very harmful conditions. When it happens in an entire field, the later manifestation of that is people who ask, “Why are there not more women who are actors, comedians, or politicians?”

Can we practice not engaging in sexual misconduct? Can we not harm others with our sexuality? Also, when we get a sense that something harmful is going on, is there a way that we can support others to help create a culture that's healthy? I'm not at all saying that sexuality is bad; it's a



natural part of us being animals in the world. But it has such potential as a force for harm. We need to be aware of that and act in accordance.

The fourth training states: “I’m going to take the training to refrain from unwise speech.” This includes avoiding false speech, harsh or abusive speech, and speech that is divisive, so slander and gossip. It even means avoiding unnecessary speech. Now many of you may feel like “As a leader, I’m doing alright. I don’t do any of those things too badly, and the first three not at all.” But almost everyone can pay attention to the fourth one—avoiding unnecessary speech.

Are we stretching the truth in any areas of interaction? Are there times that we’re talking about this one person to another in a way that creates an environment that is not safe or feels harmful? Are we impacting the sense of trust and integrity in a group or organization? At the very least, we can pay attention to how much we verbally contribute. One acronym that I’ve heard is W.A.I.T.—Why Am I Talking? This may be helpful for some people to think about.

When we refrain from speaking, we can offer an opportunity for someone else to offer their own ideas. We can offer a space for listening and we might learn something that we wouldn’t have had we been talking and taking up space. Whether your challenge is to speak up or to take a step back depends on who you are, but you have to consider that.

The fifth training consists of paying attention to our use of substances. How do we interact with substances that cloud the mind, like alcohol and other recreational drugs? We need to be really honest with ourselves about how this impacts ourselves and others, and how this impacts our ability to be a leader, to be present with others, and to see what’s needed in a given situation.

Even if someone has the best intention to practice well the first four vows, if you drink too much or get too stoned, then you can blow it and do things that you will regret. You need to pay attention to this fifth training for that reason. It’s good to pay attention to [the fourth vow] for



that reason. In all of these areas of training, we’re cultivating our actions and our speech, which are in some ways the grosser manifestations of the mind. All of these areas of life impact those around us.

If someone manifests integrity as articulated by these training precepts, then they are also the manifestation of what it would be like to be fully in harmony with the dharma. If we were fully aligned with the truth of the way things are, the truth of who *we* are, then we would note that everything is always changing and we would naturally behave with integrity.

Until that point, it’s good to take the vows and investigate—to really take them on as an ongoing learning experience of practice. This is a path of development for all of us, and it’s good to be humble about it. You might think these are very basic teachings, but there are many levels of subtlety through which we can observe how our own actions and speech impact others, or how they actually inhibit ourselves from being the best leaders and people in the world that can be.

Learning to live with integrity is an aspect of our spiritual path that is worth attending to. If you like, you can take up each of these trainings for one week or one month at a time and just observe what that’s like in your own actions and in the way others treat you. This method can help us cultivate a more kind, spacious heart, and treat others the way we would like to be treated.

We’re coming to the end of this series on leadership and dharma. We’ve covered only a small amount of the many things that we could talk about, but I invite you to the retreats that I teach on this topic. You can find more information at my website ([anushkaf.org](http://anushkaf.org)), and there are also many different places where you can practice insight meditation, the practice I’ve been talking about here.

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I hope this has been beneficial for you. I wish for you the highest blessings of happiness and success. Thank you.