Faith

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48:50

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So I thought I'd give a little talk around faith, which in the Buddha's understanding is fundamental. Nothing happens without faith. And I read a rather nice little essay on it by Nyanaponika, whom some of you might know — a very famous German monk who started the Buddhist Publication Society up in Kandy. Didn't write all that much himself, but what he wrote was influential. And his main book, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, still remains a classic on meditation.

The way I would like to tackle it is from these three constituents of an act of consciousness. I'm getting this from the Abhidhamma, but actually it should be pretty obvious to us. Not being too specific about one act of consciousness, but in a series of consciousnesses. You always have the intellectual part, the cognitive part, the understanding. There's always some affective part, your emotional involvement. And for an action, there has to be an act of will.

And you will notice that in my explanation there, I use my hand to point to three centres. So they're your basic chakras, the one in the middle of your head signifying your understanding, the heart in the middle of your chest, and the one in your belly. And it's interesting that, just a little aside, if you look at the way Buddhism grew, it was very much a cognitive effort. The Buddha's teaching is very much about, first of all, understanding and everything flows from that. But that became too rigid, too dry perhaps, so that the next wave through Mahāyāna was raising up karuṇā, raising up the heart to the level of *paññā*, wisdom. So *karuṇā* and *paññā* became equal. And if you go over to the Far East, to Japan, their centre is very much in the hara, the will — a samurai. Just a little aside, you understand. Nothing to do with faith.

So these three things I want to just look at from the point of view of faith. And before we do that, I have to make one big distinction between faith and belief. So a belief is faith in a statement. If you say, there is no God, or there is a God, then that's a statement which, in effect, you can't prove either one way or the other. But if you believe it, then it would come under a belief rather than faith. So when we're talking about faith this evening, it's concerned with an attitude, trust, confidence. That's what we're talking about.

To give us some idea as to what we mean by that, we can take a few ordinary things that we do which demand faith. If you take, for instance, supposing now you decided to climb Everest. So there would have to be these three things, wouldn't there? You'd have to have understood what the actual path of Everest

means and what it might take. It has to be that understanding. There has to be the desire to get up there, doesn't there? You might read about it and think that's very interesting but there's no desire to go up Everest. And you might have a good understanding as to what it's going to take, you might have an incredible desire, but somehow you just can't get your boots on and that's the lack of will. That's the lack of will. Lots of times like that in our lives, isn't there?

So somebody came and she was in quite an upset state because she was convinced that she had throat cancer, this particular person. And she had no trust in her doctors. So she wouldn't even go for a biopsy — not an autopsy, she wasn't dead yet — a little biopsy on the grounds that she didn't trust the doctors. And as we were discussing it and seeing what other options were open, it finally began to show that what was really undermining her faith wasn't at all to do with the doctors or the profession, it was the fear that in fact she may have throat cancer. So that underlying fear was translated into a lack of faith. I think in this case she actually did eventually go.

But if you think of anything you have to do with doctors, you have to have a primary faith that their diagnosis is correct and that the medicine they prescribe is correct. Now in the old days you would have just had blind faith in the doctor. My parents wouldn't have ever argued with a doctor. If the doctor said this pimple on your nose is a dreadful cancer they would have believed it. It wouldn't have occurred to them to question the diagnosis. These days we're a bit more argumentative. And you want to know why and what happens. Recently I went in to the doctor with tinnitus which had just arrived out of nowhere. And she said, I'll send you for a blood test. I said, a blood test? I had to squeeze out of her why she was sending me for a blood test. I won't tell you. So this whole business of even taking medicine, even going for an operation, you've got to have that trust in the surgeon.

You take another thing that we do in our lives, a job. So if you're taking on a job, especially a job which you know will stretch you, then there has to be these three elements. There has to be, first of all, that you've understood what the job is asking you to do. There has to be that attraction to the job, there has to be a desire to do it. And then finally you've got to sign on the dotted line, or else it just doesn't happen. And that's the act, that's the commitment, the act of will. And there, sometimes what stops us is that doubt — can I do it, can I do it. So you can see that the opposite of faith is doubt. There's something that stops you from that commitment.

And if we take another one, it's forming a relationship or getting married. This takes us into the realm of a more intimate human relationship where actually your trust is in this other person. They're not going to abuse you or take advantage of you. Take all your money. There's got to be that trust. And again, there is that knowledge that comes of knowing the other person long enough, the confidence that arises with that. Then, of course, that special love that one has with that sort of relationship. And then, eventually, there's got to be that movement towards yes, yes.

So these things are just little examples which we now translate into the spiritual life. So when it comes to

the spiritual life, and specifically around Buddhism, faith, the Buddha calls the spiritual faculty. Interestingly enough, he doesn't put it in with the factors of enlightenment. And the presumption is, at least I presume, is that by the time you're actually meditating, the faith must be there, at least some level of faith. Because the factors of enlightenment are put into the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish mindfulness or this awareness which leads us to the awakening. But the five faculties are not there. They're talked about in other places. What's in that particular scripture are the seven factors of enlightenment. So when it comes to the faculty, it seems to me, faith seems to me presumed.

So all of you here now, whatever commitment you have towards the Buddha's teaching, the fact is you wouldn't be here were it not that there was some faith. And if we now go back to what faith entails, the cognitive part, the actual part of understanding, so that's pointed out as three different stages. The first one is you hear the doctrine, you hear the teaching, and that immediately arouses interest. There's also something that's stirring in the heart, that this is the truth, an attraction. There must be some sort of an attraction.

And then after you've heard it and you read about it, there are reflections about it. So that the knowledge which was given, hearsay, read, now becomes your own personal understanding by way of your own reflections. And the more that happens, the more confidence arises, the more faith arises in us about the doctrine, because now in a sense it's becoming our way of thinking, our way of understanding. So it's my way, not the Buddha's way. I'm slowly turning towards that.

But there's still that missing link between an understanding which is intellectual and the actual experience. So it's all right saying that everything arises and passes away, and I mean, there are very few people in the world who wouldn't grasp that. And when we turn inward and we just look around a little bit, we can see that thoughts arise and pass away, emotions arise and pass away, feelings arise. I mean, it's not a brain twister to actually go into that, but it's actually coming to the point where this I, this me, which feels so solid, is also arising and passing away. So turning inward and really coming to terms with what transience actually means at a deeper level through our meditation, that now becomes a knowledge which is also carrying into experience. But we would never have got there, really, without that initial confidence. See, that initial confidence.

When it comes to the heart itself, there's that feeling of trust which comes in, to trust somebody, to have confidence in, faith in somebody. And then there's a desire to devote oneself — a loyal service to the Dharma, for as much as it feeds you personally. So if you're devoted to somebody, then you're there to actually help, please, make them happy. A mother and father devoted to their children. So that act of devotion is not just a lovey-dovey thing. It's part of that movement of the heart to give of oneself. A votary offering. It's an offering. And running along with that, there's love, which translates as a lightness, a joy in faith.

And then once those two are there, there comes this point of a commitment. And the commitment is at all

different levels. So it might be just the commitment to practice a bit of meditation. And eventually it's a commitment to actually follow the Buddha's path as your centre line. And a total life's devotion to it.

So, for instance, when people take refuges, refuges and precepts — that's the normal way in all forms of Buddhism. So the refuges are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. And then you take the five precepts, which is just your basic morality, not to kill anybody, steal, etc. But the first part, the taking of refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha, is an act of commitment dependent on the person. So it might be that they are committed to it just on a level of, a rather superficial level of, the Buddha's teaching is good, and it's part of my spiritual smorgasbord. I've got all this other stuff, and here's the Buddha's teaching over here, and I do a bit of that. That's fine.

As the teaching takes a more central position in your life, then the commitment comes more, to give oneself more to that teaching. But there still might be a holding back. So it takes a long time to actually commit yourself to something, especially if you are converted to it. If you're born into a religion, if you're born into a spiritual way of life, then it's just natural to you because ever since you woke up, you've been cajoled to make that sort of devotion, to make that act of devotion. But for those who have come from other forms and come into Buddhism, then it takes quite a long time before you ever get to that point of actually, if ever, that you actually commit yourself in terms of this life.

Now, you only get back what you give. So if you give a bit of commitment, then you get a little bit back. If you give a bit more, you get a bit more back. And if you give the whole thing, then eventually you get the whole thing. It's like in a relationship, if you say, well, I love you a bit, and the other person says, well, I love you a bit. And it slowly builds up until finally there's some sort of connection, which one can call a marriage in one form or another. So that's the same with our relationship to the spiritual path.

And that commitment can't be forced, you can't say, oh well, I'm fed up with messing around now, I'm going to devote myself to the Buddha Dharma Sangha. Not at all, because it's a movement within the heart. And there just comes a time in a person's life when they make these little commitments, so it grows, it grows, it grows.

Now when that happens, or as that happens, then one gets the satisfaction of acts of commitment based on faith. So here's one way of putting it. This is taken from the commentary, but it also turns up in what's known as the Questions of King Milinda, which was written quite a while after the Buddha.

And it says, "As a water purifying gem of the universal monarch" — he has seven of these by the way — "thrown into water causes solids, alluvia, water weeds and mud to subside and makes the water clear, transparent and undisturbed. So faith arising discards the hindrances, causes the corruptions to subside, purifies the mind and makes it undisturbed, the mind being purified, and the aspirant of the noble family gives gifts, observes the precepts, performs the duties of the uposatha and commences *bhāvanā*. Thus, faith should be known to have purifying as its characteristic."

So these performs the duties of the uposatha — in Buddhist countries, these full moon and the new moon and the quarters are times when lay people go to the monastery and make a special day of it, especially the full moon. And commencing *bhāvanā*, *bhāvanā* is meditation.

So here we have the purifying of water, transparency. Now all you've got to think about is those times when your life has been full of doubt — either should you move house, should you go for this job or that job, should you go into this relationship or that relationship. In those times of doubt, as soon as there's a commitment, as soon as there's a decision and a commitment, all the stuff around that disappears, doesn't it? All that disturbance, all the doubt, all the fear, it just clarifies, it just disappears. So that's what this is pointing to, that an act of faith is, or an act of taking refuge in Buddhist language, to take the refuge, is that point where all doubts, finally, about how one should lead one's spiritual life begin to fade away. And one is clear, one is clear. So that's its effect on us.

Talking again just a little bit about the intellect and the affective, the emotional thing — if something is only intellective, if it's only an understanding coming from the mind and it doesn't have the force of the heart behind it, then it remains brittle, it remains quite brittle and it can easily be cracked by another argument. Somebody coming along like for instance later on there's a question on rebirth — so if a person thinks well you have to believe in rebirth to be a Buddhist and I can't really believe that, then the whole thing shatters. So if faith is only at that intellectual understanding that this is ok, I understand it and all that, but without the heart behind it, it's not going to really penetrate, it's not really going to have the effect of true devotion.

If on the other hand it's only the heart, so sometimes one is drawn — a type of person might be drawn simply by seeing, seeing a statue of the Buddha. I know people, as soon as they've seen a statue of Buddha they fall in love with it. Something in their memory has clicked and there's this heart connection. And there's that leap of faith. But if that's not balanced with some sort of intellectual understanding about what they're doing, then we would call that blind faith.

And what happens then is an easy falling into belief systems. So I believe the Buddha is right, whatever the Buddha says it's got to be right. And what that does to the practitioner is it undermines their commitment to practice. I mean, if you have a belief that oh yeah the Buddha is right, then why prove it? See, the whole point of the practice that we do, the *bhāvanā*, the *vipassanā*, is that question: Is the Buddha correct? Has he got it right?

I mean, you're not saying that to yourself when you sit, I hope. But that's the underlying basis of the great doubt. This is not doubt as a skeptical thing. This is not coming from fear. It's coming from a desire to really know personally, as a personal experience, whether the Buddha's liberation is true. And whether once one gets to this point of *nibbāna*, whether there isn't in fact more. We might get there and we think, no, this isn't it. I've got to keep going. You don't know, do you?

And it's that sort of doubt which is better translated as a wonder, a philosopher's wonder, which drives

our meditation. So in your meditation, if you're just sitting there watching, looking, that won't do. That's called being lazy. There has to also be that sense of curiosity. If the curiosity is not there, just that simple question mark in the mind, a way of looking, then insight can't arise.

So the Buddha is quite clear. Awareness. Without awareness, without placing that attention on something, insight can't arise. So you can't have insight without the awareness. But on the other hand, that insight won't arise unless there is that curiosity in the mind, that wanting to know.

So those two are, you have to have them in balance. And of course when you say balance, there's not some objective balance. You can't go on a weighing scale and say well I've got a bit of this and I've got a bit of that. It's to do with the individual, so that every individual has to have that balance within themselves of an intellectual understanding and a commitment in terms of their devotion, in terms of what their heart wants to do.

And that will, you know, it's just like we were saying about not getting your boots on. So there can always be this lovely intellectual understanding. Some people read so much and they can splurge it all out, and quote ad infinitum. And sometimes they've got a good feeling behind it, but they don't practice. No practice at all. Don't do any meditation.

See, now what stops them doing that? What stops them making that little effort to actually climb the mountain? And that's the lack of will, the lack of commitment. So unless there's that too, there can't be progress on the path.

And it's interesting that the Buddha puts faith opposite, or he balances faith in the five faculties, he balances it with insight. So if there's no faith, if there's not that act of devotion to the practice, then insight can't come up. So these two things are intimately linked.

And eventually when we have an insight which is an insight into the final goal, which is known as entering the stream, the *Sotāpanna*, at that point this faith becomes unshakeable. It's then known not so much as an *indriya*, which we translate as faculty, it becomes a *bala*, which means a strength. So now that faith now is unshakeable because that person has actually seen the top of the mountain. They know where it is. It's no longer clouded. It's not that they can't see it because they've actually touched it. And now that faith, which is a strength, of course, must necessarily draw them to the end of the path through the next few stages.

So until, it's understood that until we have intuited this nirvanic moment, faith will always have a little shake in it. There'll always be a little shake in it.

And that really brings us to what undermines our faith, what undermines your commitment to the practice. The first one we've already talked about, this confusion between faith and belief. So you can very easily slip into that lazy place where you say, well, I believe the Buddha, what's the point? And it undermines that practice. So you've got to keep up that sense of curiosity, that sense of wanting to know.

And the Buddha laid that out very clearly when he visited the Kalamas. It's a very famous discourse. Everybody quotes it, so I may as well quote it myself. So he ended up at the village of the Kalamas, and the Kalamas said to him, we're in a state of calamity. And he said, everybody who comes here tells us that this is what it's all about, this is the truth, and everybody else is wrong. So who are we to believe? Where are we to go?

And he says, do not believe anything simply because you've heard it, simply because it is tradition handed down for many generations, simply because it is spoken and rumoured by the many, simply because it is found written in your religious books, and simply on the authority of your teachers and elders. In other words, don't believe anything. And then he says, only when it works for you, only when you've tried it out, only when it's something which is of benefit to you, would you then commit yourself to it.

So belief is something which would be contrary to the Buddha's path as such.

The other thing is that we talked about was this balance between devotion or the heart and the understanding. And this is from the commentaries. And it says, for one strong in faith and weak in understanding has confidence uncritically and groundlessly. So that's your blind faith. That's your gullibility. That's believing something, right?

For one strong in understanding and weak in faith errs on the side of cunning and is as hard to cure as one sick of a disease caused by medicine. Interesting, isn't it? We know about the side effects of drugs. One strong in understanding and weak in faith.

So what they're saying here, what he's saying here is that you can have such a good intellectual grasp of Buddhism that you actually believe you've experienced it. And there's a total confusion between something that has been so clearly understood and something which has been directly experienced.

And I knew of a monk who actually believed that himself. He did, he had an enormous, wonderful, deep grasp of the Dharma. And he was convinced that he must be a reborn stream entrant. In other words, he'd already somewhere in his past life, he had intuited *Nibbāna*. Or else how could he have this amazing, wonderful understanding of the Buddha's teaching?

And that is such an easy confusion, related to those who have a very strong intellect. And so it then goes on to say, with the balancing of the two, a person has confidence where there are grounds for it. In other words, it's the balance that we're looking for.

The other one is more to do with self-expectation. The big one about self-doubt. Everybody can do it but not me. That sort of thing. And that can be a real barrier to progress. There's a particular monk in the scriptures who becomes despairing of his practice and commits suicide. Fortunately, when the Buddha comes along and is asked, well, what happened to this monk? Where's he gone? He says, oh, he became enlightened in the process of committing suicide.

Now, I'm not suggesting, of course, that. In this case, it was a happy outcome. But I don't think there's a deeper despair than spiritual despair. To despair of somebody, to despair of your ability to have a relationship, to despair of your ability to earn money and live a good life. All these things that throw people into suicide and jump off bridges. I'm thinking particularly of a young man in Australia who made, and remember this is a piece of news, who made an enormous amount of wealth on property. And when that thing crashed in the mid-90s, he committed suicide.

But when we're talking about spiritual despair, that digs at the deepest level of our being, doesn't it? Because that's what the spiritual life is about. It's about being. It's about who are we at fundament. And to have entered the spiritual path and to have seen the possibility of spiritual advancement and spiritual attainment and that end of suffering and then to despair that one could ever achieve that. I don't think you can get worse than that when it comes to despair anyway.

So don't despair. So that when self-doubt comes up like that, it can often be caused by an over-expectation. You know, you thought you'd be further along the path than this, than you are now. And there's pride involved in that and a loss of self-esteem.

I met a man and he said to me, when he first came to meditation, he went to a course, this was back in the 70s, he went to a course of meditation and he went to it as you would go to any old course of calligraphy or basket making or, French or something. And he went along and the idea was you got an Ibana, you got a certificate and then you left. It was a week on how to attain *Nibbāna*. He entered the course thinking he'd have a go and at the end he'd know *Nibbāna* and that was it. That's what he'd come for.

Well, of course, as the course began to end, the despair entered into the heart and it took him a while to realize that it wasn't that sort of course. And that's why you don't get certificates after meditation courses. Nobody hands you a certificate. So this expectation.

So here's the Buddha. He says, I do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away. Nevertheless, the attainment of profound knowledge comes by a gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual course. How does the attainment of profound knowledge come? By means of gradual training, gradual doing and gradual course. As it is, one who has faith draws near. Drawing close, they sit down nearby. Sitting nearby, they lend an ear. Lending an ear, they hear the Dharma. Having heard the Dharma, they remember it. They test the meaning of things they have borne in mind. Whilst testing the meaning, things are approved of. They're being approved of things. Desire is born. When desire is born, they make an effort. Having made the effort, they weigh it up. Having weighed it up, they strive. Being self-resolute, they realize for themselves the highest truth itself. Penetrating by means of wisdom.

See? Stages. And you also have to be careful that, so the whole point is that when we practice to abandon all expectation. This is the point. So abandon all expectation. And this will, if you don't, then you'll get into that failure success. And that's where the trouble starts.

And when you get a lack of success, it can be a sort of misunderstanding really. Remember that all spiritual traditions warn us that the spiritual path is full of deserts. Dry places, empty places. And it's surprising how many people when they enter into that place just begin to slag off and disappear and then they reappear about 20 years later.

But those periods when you think you are not advancing are more important than those periods when you think you are. That's the slog, that's the dryness, that's the desert. You've just got to keep one foot in front of the other. And I use the image before the mountain. So mountains are used often in the spiritual literature because they're so close to the experience of the spiritual life.

The idea of having this constant. The actual practice is extremely simple. To climb a mountain, all you've got to remember is you put one foot in front of the other and, generally speaking, go up. That's it, isn't it? I mean, you don't need any more instructions than that. Then, of course, there comes all sorts of techniques and ways of handling certain situations. Stamina, commitment, yeah?

And the worst thing you can do on a mountain, especially the high you get, is to sit down and have a break which is just a wee bit too long and you start getting cold. And you drink your last cup of tea. And that's it. You're on the way down then. So it's a case of that commitment, especially during those periods where you feel that nothing is happening. It doesn't matter how long nothing is happening. You just keep going. Just keep going.

And it's a testing time. You're just looking at the fact of the loss of self-esteem, the feeling that you're not going anywhere, as if there was anywhere to go, a lack of success. All comes up, and it's the ego. So the dryness, the aridity of practice, is one of the most potential parts to get rid of the ego. And usually it's a time when we give up, which is a sorrow, because it takes a bit to get up there. So don't worry about lack of success, just keep doing the job.

Then of course there are the more obvious things, doubt in the Buddha. The doubt, a doubt in the Buddha always has felt to me, in a sense, slightly unnecessary. Because as you go along, there are side posts there. You don't have to believe in *Nibbāna*. You don't have to believe at all in any of that stuff. The whole point about the Dharma is that it's immediate. You either benefit from it now or you don't. That's the point.

But when we're practicing we might not see, shall we say, an immediate benefit from it right here and now in this present moment, but when we look back on our practice over a period of years we can see that it's helped us to progress and it's part of our progression and it might even be the fundamental reason for our progression. So it's that ability to see that the doubt that we have in the practice is undermined by not looking too far ahead. It's right here and now. So if we can look back and think a little bit, oh, this is a benefit, then we don't lose that sense of faith in what we're doing.

When it comes to the Sangha, that's really an extension of faith in the Buddha because the Sangha is simply other people who've said that they've actually attained the same thing. And the more people who

say that, the more of course it gives other people confidence. Now these three things have to be, or at least two of them, have to be internal.

Even at the end, when the Buddha actually becomes enlightened, as that doubt appears, is this it or is there more, and that's when Mara attacks him with all the armies, that's how it's put in the mythology, and the Buddha touches the earth. You've seen the posture, the *Bhumisparsa* posture where he's touching the earth, and that was the point where he touched the earth as a witness as it were that he had attained the end of suffering. And the earth quaked and the earth goddess rose, wringing from her hair the water poured as libation to her by the Buddha in previous lives. That's nice, isn't it?

But when we actually take the refuge, it's not simply in that historical Buddha, it's the presumption that there's a Buddha within us, that there's something within us which is to be liberated. And that's what you're taking your faith in.

So when the Buddha is dying, Ananda wants to know who's going to take his place. Because Ananda has this overflowing faith in the Buddha. And the Buddha's answer is that he mustn't take faith in him as a person, but take faith in the Dharma, the teaching itself, the practice itself.

And in himself: be a light unto yourself, take the Dharma as your light, take the Dharma as your guide, take the Dharma as your teacher, take yourself as your guide, yourself as your teacher. So eventually this is our journey, that's all the Buddha is saying. And the usual quote is: the Buddha's only point the way.

So eventually when we take these refuges, when we make that commitment, it's always a commitment to ourselves. And there was only one period in Buddhist history that I know of where there was a collapse of faith, where there was a doubt that there were some human beings who couldn't make it. And it's a heresy, of course.

And these people who couldn't make it were labelled the *Icchantikas*. And Icchantika means forever going on in the world of *saṃsāra*. There was no ending to their rebirth because they were so stupid. But luckily that didn't take on. It remains there as one of these little side schools that believe that some beings were really thick. They couldn't make it, even if they tried.

I must tell you, in Sri Lanka it's very strange to us, but they can tell by the shape of somebody's head – or some monks can tell, and nuns I presume, can tell by the shape of somebody's head – whether they're going to make it or not. And the teacher at my own monastery, who was an excellent teacher, a direct disciple of the Mahāsi, very strict, very demanding, and often wouldn't take on students, but he wouldn't take on certain students whose head wasn't quite right. I say no more. Maybe there are ways of telling things that we're not privy to – that's all there is to it.

So I think I've just about covered all the bits that I wanted to cover. I suppose one thing I might just say is how to make faith grow. We haven't done that, really.

So first of all, there's the spiritual friendship. That's very important: to be with the right people. To be with people of like mind who are supporting you is obvious, I mean. The Buddha – Ānanda says to the Buddha, "I believe that right relationship, good relationship, is only half of the spiritual livelihood." And the Buddha says, "Oh no, it's the whole of spiritual livelihood."

When a meditator has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that they will develop and cultivate the Eightfold Noble Path.

Also to be clear about one's training. See, if you're sloppy with your virtue, then it also slips. It undermines your commitment to the path because you cannot separate insight from virtue. You can't have a Buddha who goes around robbing. Wisdom is also an act – when it expresses itself, it is virtuous.

You have to be careful of your speech especially, it says. You must be energetic in abandoning what is unprofitable. Remember that every time you attend to something, there's an act of intention. Therefore, it's conditioning. You have to be careful what programmes you watch on the telly.

And finally, the understanding of impermanence. The more we understand impermanence, the more we get what's known as *saṃvega*, that enthusiasm. I mean, we haven't got that long, have we?

And visits to the teacher or to a centre where you get teaching. And also, just as an aside, the group – the evening group, your local group. That's always a nice fillip. I always remember making that effort every week to go across town in order to join a group had an effect of raising the effort for the whole practice for the week. And if I missed it, I could feel the lack of energy during the week. So remember that the effort you put into a practice is an attitude, and the attitude stays with you.

So I think that brings me to an end of my little homily. I'll just leave you with a little final refrain taken from the *Sutta Nipāta*:

Faith, in the way that we've been describing it, is the best wealth to a person of this world. Well-practised Dharma brings the most happiness. Truth is the sweetest of all tastes, and living with wisdom is said to be of the noblest kind.

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