The Buddha and the Hindrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47:30

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa

I thought tonight to give a wide sweep to our meditation practice, to see if I can put it in some context, beginning perhaps with the Buddha's own experience, and then this crucial teaching of the wheel of dependent origination, his understanding of where our peculiar delusion lies. And then finally at the end, hopefully, a little bit about these problems we come across when we're sitting, these hindrances.

So the Buddha himself is the basic paradigm, he's the archetype of this particular path, that's what he stands for. And his early life is meant to be full of pleasure, easygoing, loving family, all that stuff, everything that people dream about these days. And around about his early twenties, middle twenties, something happened and he got fed up with it. And what we can say is that he went through what we would now call an existential crisis. He wondered why he was alive. In his terms, why he suffered.

In the mythology surrounding that psychological event, we have this business of him being out hunting or wandering around the countryside when he comes across three different types of people. One is very sick, one's very old, and one's dead. And each time it comes as a surprise to him because previously he'd been shielded from this by his family. So we can take this as a metaphor for the fact that not until our early twenties do we really have an inkling of what death might be. It's the stirrings of a future middle-aged crisis, we can say, and the following old age crisis.

So he's now asking about these three things: sickness, old age and death. Does every human being suffer from this? Do I suffer from this? And it was this recognition that the end of life normally ends with some sickness, some what my father called the decrepitude of old age, and death. And of course it makes nonsense of trying to live a life around pleasure, riches, fame and anything else which is going to come to an end because fundamentally what we want is something which is going to last, some everlasting state.

So there was a movement during his time—it had begun before—this business of leaving home and becoming an ascetic. It tended to be anti-establishment. The establishment was the Brahminical tradition, which eventually developed into what we now know as Hinduism. And they did have their ascetics, but new teachers came along who said quite radically different things. One of them was what we would call now an absolute materialist. You just have the body, and there was the brain, and when you died, that was the end of it.

There were some people with strange ideas about karma, some predestination that you had to run the

gauntlet of karma. So from being born a bug, you then had to go right through to a rat, to a cow, to a human being, and onwards until the process just naturally came to an end. And there was nothing you could do about it. So this person said, if you went up one side of the Ganges, slaughtering and pillaging and doing all sorts of rubbish, it wouldn't have any effect at all on this predestined path. And if you came down the other side and did great acts of compassion and wonderful acts of love, it would make no difference whatsoever. It was completely predestined.

So within that atmosphere the Buddha began his training and he began his training with what you might call the conservative orthodox line of Brahmanism. He went to two teachers who basically taught him very ancient techniques of meditation which were about gaining very highly ecstatic states of mind. And whenever he achieved this, to the satisfaction of the teacher, the teacher would acclaim him as equal to them, these two teachers, and then invite him to teach. But both times, he refused the appointment and said that it hadn't completely satisfied him. He hadn't really got to the end of suffering because whenever he came out of these states, he was as bad as he was before. There wasn't any particular improvement.

So he then went on to a second type of training that was very common in those days, and that was what we now term self-mortification. So whereas the worldly life, the materialist life, presumes that you can get happiness through the ordinary gifts that we get through living, TVs and stuff like that, and perhaps there's a stoicism there that, well, you can't be perfectly happy, that attitude. The meditative school that he went to said that real happiness wasn't to do with the material world, it was mental. So you could create these beautiful mental states. So even here, in our *vipassanā* meditation, sometimes beautiful states do arise, correct? Definitely. And we can presume that this is nirvana, this is actually where we're really aiming for, if we could just maintain it.

The next school said that, in a sense, what was wrong was the body itself. Somehow you had to free yourself from the body. So self-mortification exercises were to do with subduing the body. And the most common was just to starve it, was to eat very little. Now those of you who've done something like a ten-day fast, a water fast, will know that the first three days, just like a retreat, are horrible. And then somehow the body has cleared a lot of its toxins and you can feel quite lovely within the body. Except, of course, that the body is now eating itself. So you can't go on like that for too long.

So they reduced their intake to a minimum, and he says of himself that he came to a point where he could hold his spine through his stomach. That gives you an idea of how thin he got. But this led him nowhere either.

So in desperation, he was by himself sitting on a road, probably looking fairly disconsolate when a woman passed by with, it seems, a bowl of rice pudding to offer to a particular deity in a shrine. But seeing him in such a miserable state, offered it to him. Actually, the commentaries bump it up a bit. They say that she thought he was a deity and therefore offered it to him. I can't really imagine him looking like a deity. Anyway, this rice pudding gave him a certain energy, which he'd been lacking through this

self-mortification exercise, and it brought up a certain hope in him, and he must have been recollecting his own spiritual journey.

And he remembered this point in childhood, probably around about the age of eight, something like that, eight, nine, ten, when he's watching his father doing the ceremonial first ploughing of the season. And that state he recalled as being somehow different from all the mental stuff, from all the states that he'd achieved through these meditations. It was a very concentrated state. In the commentaries it says it's a sort of *jhāna*. But something different had been about that state, which he recognized as having some investigative, some curiosity.

Now, the image, when I want to describe to people what this *satipaññā*, this awareness with intuitive wisdom is like, the closest I can get to in terms of an image is of a little child round about the beginning of language, where there's no great conceptual thinking, where they see something like a little bug, which they've never seen before. And they become entranced, don't they? They become totally bewitched by it. They just look at it. You can see them. They're just locked onto the object. And they're watching intently, and even so that the mouth drops, the jaw drops.

Now, one of the things about the posture is that, especially in Zen, because Zen is very good at describing posture, they always say that the lips are together but the teeth are apart. So when your teeth are apart, your jaw is relaxed. In your meditation, if you watch, whenever you're thinking, you may feel very small little movements on your tongue. Because the thoughts always are connected to the tongue, just as a natural thing, because of speech. And any tension about thinking or whatnot immediately brings in the jaw. So sometimes in your meditation, even by concentrating on your tongue and on the relaxation of the jaw, you can find that your thoughts stop. Your thoughts at least are calmed.

So that moment when a child just looks at something with that open curiosity, a child's not coming to that experience with a concept. And while it's there with the experience, it hasn't got conceptual thinking to think about it. So all it can do is just purely absorb directly what's going on. It's only then, after a certain time, will it turn around and ask what it is. What is that?

So trying to get back to that pure inquisitive without a verbal question consciousness—that's what we're trying to do. That's the aim of the practice. And what we're doing is we're trying to lift that consciousness out of its confusion. With confusion, it's blending with everything that we experience in the body as feelings, in the heart, and in thoughts.

So now the Buddha went to sit, and in a sense he was at the end of his tether, so he made this rather remarkable determination that he wouldn't move, he wouldn't shift from the seat until he was fully enlightened, or he'd die. I don't know whether you've tried that. It doesn't last very long for me anyway. It's one too many. But anyway, that was his determination and he just sat there. Luckily for him and for us of course, he made the breakthrough and he came to this understanding.

Now this understanding, it's said, that he then spent the first night going through the psychological understanding of what he'd experienced, to show how suffering arises. Then he went through the next night the other way, to show how it came to an end. And then, in the third night, he recapitulated and did them both. So this is just a way, really, again, of saying that when the Enlightenment came, when he actually realized the way things really are, it took a while for this whole thing to work out in terms of how to teach it, looking at the human being from the point of view of the enlightened person.

Now one thing that I've come across having been in the East and then coming back to the West—in the East always hearing, shall we say, the paradigm about the human being from the Buddhist point of view and therefore going through a spate of years where I'm out of touch with things like psychodynamic theory and stuff like that—coming back to the West I began to realize that the way we look at things is from a different angle.

And this has come up quite sharply since I've been down at Gaia House, where that area around Totnes and Dartington and all that is a hotbed of alternative stuff. So I've got myself a really bad name as being anti-psychotherapy and all that. But I didn't actually mean to do that. What I was trying to do was try and make very clear to people that if you want to become enlightened, if you want to actually be liberated from suffering from the Buddha's point of view, then you've really got to understand the psychology as the Buddha understood it.

So this takes us now into this wheel of dependent origination which we talked a little bit about this morning and during the day. And the fundamental stance of the Buddha, what he came to understand was that the fundamental problem was ignorance. Now this ignorance is not culpable. We're not blameworthy. It's a simple existential state. We don't know.

So, not worrying about whether we have a past life or a future life, but just taking this life. Consider, in Buddhist understanding, the mind and consciousness arise with conception. So that is what consciousness is actually experiencing. Just being in a cellular life, in a very material base. And it's only later, as the fetus grows, that it begins to get some messages about feeling, touch, hearing, things like that. When it's born, then of course we open our eyes, light comes in, we begin to hear things, we begin to understand things. And all this is, as it were, coming into a consciousness which has begun from a position of not knowing.

So that not knowing now makes a mistake which is quite understandable. It presumes itself to be what it finds itself in. I am the body, I am these feelings, I am what I think. I think therefore I am. It comes all the way up to the highest of philosophers, so you can understand that that's a very—I mean what else could consciousness do? It doesn't have another choice.

Now, having made this step, this mistake of thinking that we are this body, we are this mind, etc., which is your basic delusion, on the wheel of dependent origination, that's *saṅkhāra*. That's your dispositions, that's what it's created, a certain mode of dispositions around this essential mistake of thinking we are, for want of a better word, human beings. Now from that, of course, we form a relationship to the world

whereby me is here and everything and every other is out there.

Now this me and other become a separation. So this is what Buddhism means by a duality, living in a dual world. There's me here and everybody else out there. And me, I have things, so these are mine. As soon as I've created mine, I've created yours. Having created mine and yours, I live now in a very dualistic world. And the tighter I am about me, the closer I am about me, the more afraid I am about maintaining me, this, what might have been some boundary, becomes more and more a barrier.

So this differentiation between barrier and boundary. A river, for instance, might flow through a certain countryside, and on one side it might be green, and on the other side it might be desert. And what it's doing is it's creating a certain boundary, you might say, where there's a watershed on one side and none on the other. But it's quite possible that things can move across it. But when these two places become two countries, then this river suddenly becomes a barrier, and nobody can move from one place to the other.

So what the me does, this ego—I don't particularly like using the word ego. It is used. The better word is the self, this sense of self that we have. What the self does is, of course, it demarcates very sharply. This is me, and that's not me. This is mine, and that's not mine.

So now, once the self has got itself into that position, it now presumes itself to be more secure. Remember, fear is always the root emotion of self. Fear is right there at the base. It's prior to any other emotion. Why? Because the one thing that self is afraid of is its own death. That's why it's always trying to aggrandize itself. That's why it's always trying to sustain and trying to really make everything secure, batten things down.

So this self now has a relationship to the world whereby it's going to feel more secure the bigger it is. The bigger house I've got, the bigger the pension, the bigger the car, I feel better. And the more things I've got, the more things I own. So you can see how this aggrandizement slips into immorality. Because at some point, I'm up against other people. So I'm now into thieving and not doing my tax returns. Things like that, I try to fiddle, you know, just don't make...

And how now you're into this area of aversion, of hatred, of pushing things away that you find are impinging upon your little bit of security. And how when it's too much, there's fear. This goes right through, not only just material well-being, but even our relationships. My partner, my children. Do you see what I mean? And then you get this barrier turning up. And then you get working for your own family, for your own ethnic group, for your own nationality, for your own civilization. Do you see what I mean? It grows out like that.

And of course, wherever it meets the other, that is your conflict. That is your war.

So, what the Buddha discovered was this root cause, this root cause of self. That's the point. Now, having discovered this root cause, this idea of a self, this feeling of a self, he now discovers that there are these three characteristics which symbolize the state of that self. Three fundamental, you might say, delusions.

The first one is that although things, shall we say, change, actually I'm always the same.

The self always seems to be the same self. I go to sleep and I wake up in the morning and I feel the same as I fell asleep. There's a feeling running through life that, okay, everything else changes a little bit, but I, me, inside me, I never change. I'm always the one person that I always thought I was.

Now that, of course, is manifestly untrue, because when we actually look at what we mean by me, it turns out to be the personality, the character, my thinking, because these are all the things that the self says it is. But we know that we're not the same person that we were at the age of two, when we looked at bugs and discovered this wonderful *satipaññā*, this awareness wisdom, which we since forgot.

And this same self now presumes itself to be solid. So it doesn't change. If it doesn't change, it must be solid, it must be substantial. So it somehow stands outside the world that we live in. So that's the self, you see. And these are the two characteristics, the two basic characteristics, that it doesn't change and that it's solid, it's immortal.

When that is taken a step further up into our daily living, then we get this business of a relationship to what we experience. So that's when we get this business of wanting what makes me happy, what gives me pleasure, and not wanting what doesn't give me pleasure. So I'm now caught in a duality, right?

If you just watch yourself in ordinary daily life, you'll see that there's this constant judging going on. Liking, disliking, wanting, not wanting. If I like it, I want it. If I don't like it, I don't want it. So the whole of life is just partitioned into these things. If I like the person, then we can meet for coffee. If I don't like them, I don't want to see them. So this constant shifting of life according to these two different colours, the dark and the bright.

So these are your three characteristics. You can call them existential characteristics because they are fundamental to this whole idea of what is the meaning of our existence. So, again, what is the purpose of our meditation, in a sense, from the point of view of what is it we're actually trying to see? Well, we're trying to see these three things. Because in seeing these three things clearly, and seeing that they are false, that brings about the liberation of that very consciousness, which is identified with everything it did think was permanent and substantial.

So our viewpoint of whatever comes up is always coming from these three angles. So for instance, when I'm sitting here, you see, all these hindrances come up. So the first one may be something like, I've been planning to go on a holiday somewhere. So I've come on this weekend retreat and all I can think about is this holiday I'm planning. Because that's what's uppermost in my mind and that's what I'm really going to enjoy, and I've got all these ideas of what I want to do and where I want to go. So I'm sitting here and it's quite natural because I want to do this, the mind will now be incredibly inventive and give you all sorts of wonderful ideas.

So what we want to do is we want to discover what's empowering this? Why can't I just stop it? Why can't

I just say, well this weekend I'll put it to the side and I won't think about this anymore. Why can't we do it? Coming to terms with the fact that we're not actually in control of the mind is a bit of an eye-opener. Whereas we thought it was me thinking, actually it's thinking, and I'm swamped by it.

There are occasions when I can use it. For instance, if I go on holiday, I have to use it for planning. I've got to phone people up. I've got to set up hotels and et cetera, et cetera. So this is a correct use, you see. But overlaying that are all these dreams about what we're going to do, how it's going to be. And that's where the wishing is coming, that's where the wanting is coming. And once we've begun to build an atmosphere, a conditioning in the mind of seeking pleasure in a holiday, seeking happiness in a holiday, then of course it'll carry on.

So here we come to a meditation and suddenly we can't stop thinking about it. It's completely flooded us. So now, what we've come to realize is that by empowering a certain conditioning, we give it its own life. And the only thing we can do once we've set something in motion is wait for that momentum to die out.

Exactly the same in a way as you drive a car. You can stomp on the brakes as hard as you want, but it's still going to move forward. So, in our meditation here, if we try and stomp on this stuff, what is it we're stomping on? What is it we're trying to put the brakes on? Now that, you can see, is a suppressive measure. So it's no good if we're full of this desire and the mind's just full of thinking, full of thinking, full of thinking, to get hard with it and smack it on and get rigid and start watching the breath come what may. Because that's just putting the brakes on. All we're going to do is create even more turbulence, more bad energy within the system.

So all we can do is recognize that here is the conditioning I've set up. Because only me can govern the mind. Because only me can put ideas into the mind and empower those ideas. So here I am in this enormous desire, and what can I do? So every time I wake up, I just have to recognize, ah, desire, holiday, desiring, desiring. Then I come back.

Now I have two choices. I can either come back to the breath, or I can, as it were, search for the excitement in the body, that sense of wanting to enjoy myself. Now, if I go back to the breath, even though I do it gently, in a way, that's also a very gentle suppression. I've acknowledged it as it is, but I'm still not looking at the root cause.

Now, many a time, the mind is just restless. And often, you'll find that just by guiding the mind back to the breath, it'll just bring a sense of peace. But when it's very strong, then you've really got to go underneath it to find out what the emotion is that's empowering it. So dropping into the body, one feels that excitement, you see. Staying with that excitement at the feeling level means that, A, it isn't going to slip up into these higher faculties and create further dreams. And B, just by watching it here, because it can't do this, it'll just begin to slowly die out.

And the time it takes to die out is a measure of how much we've empowered it. So if it's going to take a

couple of hours, it takes a couple of hours. If it's going to take a couple of weeks, it's going to take a couple of weeks. There's not much you can do about it.

Now, whenever the mind wanders off like that, even though it hasn't been a conscious decision on our part, there has been a moment of empowerment. This is known in Buddhist psychology as habitual, an habitual act of will. So there's many things in life that we just do as an habitual act of will. You just catch yourself doing something. Often, even before you know it, an idea for tea's come in your head, and before you know it, you're drinking it. So it's just been empowered naturally as a habit. That's what a habit is.

So now, recognizing that there has been an act of will in there, you see, we're even sharper, as it were, to wake up out of that fantasy and to recognize what's happened. Now, the thing about an habitual act of will is that it will just keep the wheel rolling. It won't actually make it that much worse. It's only if you were to stop here and say, well, I've come on this retreat, but really, what I really want to do is think about Machu Picchu and Antigua. So you sit here, and that's what you do. Well, of course, you're off then. You've written a book.

Now, every time you wake up out of that and you notice, ah, dreaming, dreaming, okay, and you come back, and you come back either to the breath or to the emotion, you see, now that is an act of will, a conscious act of will. That's an empowering act of will. That's beginning to develop a new attitude, a new habit of being in the present.

So there's your practice with desire, with anything which attracts us. When it comes to the second hindrance, aversion, all the little grudges and hatreds and irritations which also do very much the same thing, it's exactly the same technique. You have to observe what it is, you have to recognize, acknowledge what it is. That's irritation, you see. And then again, if it's something small, something silly, perhaps you can come back to the breath and it will just, as it were, die out because it's not being empowered.

But if it's very strong, then you may have to go into the body, as it were, and search the feeling of anger, search and feel the irritation, the grudge, the unforgivingness, whatever's there that's causing it. And you have to stay there, you see, you have to wait for it to burn out, which isn't sometimes very pleasant.

Now, when you get there, you've got to recognize the feeling of not wanting to actually experience these things. So there's your aversion. This aversion is actually what's not allowing that bad feeling, that anger to die out, because we like, we enjoy expressing anger. Correct? It's a relief, isn't it? But with the relief of anger, with the relief of kicking the dog or something, there is a development of that particular way of thinking, that particular way of feeling. So we're actually saying, it's right for me to get angry. So we have to come back on that and we have to notice this relationship we have with anger, with cruelty.

Cruelty is a delicious thing. The torturer enjoys his job. Correct? Definitely. Because he wouldn't do it, huh? So that's this whole business of aversion.

In aversion, of course, there's boredom. So boredom can be a real bane for meditators. And what you've

really got to ask yourself about boredom is, where's it coming from, you see? What's the root of boredom? It's expectancy, isn't it? We expect something exciting. We expect something to happen. We expect some great, wonderful thing and nothing's happening. We get bored. I'm just watching the breath. I mean, what the hell? Really boring. See?

So again, you have to be very careful because what boredom will tell us to do is to seek distraction. So you're watching the breath here and you think, I'll watch it here. And then you watch it, yeah, boredom. I'll do a mantra. And then you're all fed up with that. I'm going to do some walking. Before you know it, you're just being swung around by this boredom.

So the last thing you do with boredom is seek distraction. You just keep going back and you feel the boredom. It's an aversion. It's a dislike. Hatred, you see. And again, you always notice your relationship to boredom. How you don't want to feel it. Don't want to feel it.

The next two can be pretty heavy too, the sloth and torpor, especially on the first day of a retreat, first couple of days actually. I must say that those of you who have only experienced one day, two day or three day retreat probably don't realise that it actually does get better. Things do lift and you do get a clarity. For the first three days, you're getting rid of all the stuff you brought with you, you see. So it can be quite difficult and also trying to lift the energy.

Even when we live a very fast, pacey life, it's actually mixed in with things like anxiety and stress and stuff. And that's not a good energy. So when you come here, when you come to a retreat like this, of course, because there's nothing to do, see what happens to all that energy? It doesn't know where to go. So it just collapses into itself. You just feel this exhaustion, this restless boredom, this restless exhaustion.

So the first three days of any course that you go on, of this nature anyway, are always brutal. So sloth and torpor, they refer to just two different states of feeling down. One is the physical tiredness. One is the mental cloud that you can get into. And sometimes they both come together. In fact, they mostly come together. Sometimes you can feel the one and not the other. You can be fairly clear in the head, but you just feel down.

Now, again, you don't do what the hindrance tells you. The hindrance says, have a kip. Ten minutes, you feel great, you see. But in fact you go to sleep and that's the end of it because what you're doing is you're piling more energy pushing down, you see, using sleep as a suppressive. Yeah, remember we were taught that early on as kids? You know, if we get a bit naughty then it's because they're tired, you know. Put them to bed and then you wake up all right and you think oh yeah, if I feel bad I go to bed.

And of course depressives, people who are depressed and especially those who have depression as illness, so much of their time is just going to sleep, just falling asleep because of this awful heaviness and they haven't got the will, they haven't got perhaps a reason to lift themselves up against it.

So the thing to do when you feel slothful or tired is to do the opposite. You put energy into the posture, you

open your eyes. If you feel that that's not good enough, do some standing. Stand up. See? Just refuse to be annihilated. And that's why it is important during the day to get every walking period, get a good 10, 20 minutes of fast walking because there is a connection between the body and these sorts of feelings too.

The next one is the opposite of that, a sense of restlessness. Now for me, the way I experience it, is that the one is the other, one's going in, and one's coming out. Now restlessness, of course, tells you to get up and do things. Don't hang about. Don't just sit there and do something. So again, you do the opposite. You sit very still, you don't move, and you just try and get in touch with that feeling of wanting to move, wanting to go.

Often, of course, it begins to express itself in these fantasies. So in which case you've got to work with those desires. But sometimes it can be just almost a pure restlessness, just a feeling of fidgetiness, you see. So the more you relax around that, the more you relax the body. Remember the posture, in the posture the energy is just coming up the spine. That's all the energy you need to become enlightened. If you could sit like that and maintain your mindfulness, the Buddha says, for seven days, you'd probably make it. Either that or what we call the non-returner.

So, you know, it's worth getting the posture right, eh? So, you're lifting the energy up the spine, see, it's straight up the spine, and then with the out-breath, you can imagine it coming down into the abdomen, the *hara*. See, this is where the will is based.

So, whenever there's frazzleness, whenever the body feels restless, just lift the spine up, you see, draw the energy with the in-breath up the spine, with the out-breath down the body, and relax around it, you see, and you'll feel that restlessness. But because it's got nowhere to hold on to, you see, eventually it'll just collapse, it'll just turn.

And this is true, you know, if you feel restless before you sleep. One of the good tricks to go to sleep if you feel very restless is to take a position where you are comfortable, then refuse to move. You don't move at all. And then you'll see, it'll be a battle for a little while. The body wants to move around and do this.

And then suddenly it'll just flip and that's it. Because it's got nowhere to go, so it just burns itself out. But as soon as you turn over, as soon as you get up from the posture, you've empowered it. It feels good — the uncomfortable feeling of restlessness disappears when you move, but the restlessness as a way in which turbulent energy is expressing itself is simply being re-empowered. Do you see? So the more we can suffer this stuff, the more we can burn, the more we can allow ourselves to sit in the midst of these flames, the quicker all these hindrances begin to die out for us.

The other one which is linked in with restlessness is guilt, remorse — all that to do with what happens when we do something which is harmful. And you can see, because that makes you fidgety, doesn't it? Guilt makes you jump a bit. So again, it's very much the same thing. When guilt feelings come up, remorse feelings come up, all those feelings, it's the very same thing. One acknowledges them, one stops the

dreaming, one goes into the feeling. One goes into the feeling, one suffers the consequences of one's unwholesome actions.

There's no need for punishment in Buddhism. You just have to suffer the consequences of your actions. There's no need to judge ourselves as evil or bad. There's no need to give ourselves extra punishment. You don't have to give yourself up to the police. Isn't that a relief? You can just sit there and the very pain of coming to terms with these things is the consequence and the healing.

It's very interesting because I read a little article on — if you remember, in England we had that terrible Moors murder with Brady and Myra Hindley. And he's written a book, it seems, about serial killers, and it's meant to be a very insightful book. The person who helped him write it says in the article that he asked him, did he ever think about the suffering of his victims? And his answer is very telling. He said, if I thought about the suffering of my victims, I'd go mad. So it's in him, you see. You can't hurt anybody out there without hurting yourself. Very interesting that, I thought.

And the final one is doubt. The Buddha asks us not to believe anything that he says. It's not a faith religion in that sense, because it's about knowledge, it's about understanding. And faith grows. Faith is an intellectual ascent. It's a confidence we put into the teaching of the Buddha by way of listening, which makes sense to us. So we hear the teaching, it makes sense to us, and then we go away and we think about it ourselves, and we do a bit of practice, and the confidence comes to give the practice a go.

When the practice begins to yield results, then of course you tend to get more confidence in the practice, and so it rolls on until — it is said when a person glimpses, has that glimpse of *nibbāna*, the *sotāpanna*, the stream entrant, as they're called. Once that happens, of course they know now that there is an end to suffering. Even if it's only a glimpse, the Buddha says it's like a flash of lightning, as quick as that. But at least within that person there is this real knowledge of the end of suffering, at which point faith now becomes rock hard. It can't be disturbed.

But until that point happens to us, then there will always be some doubts floating around. And doubt, of course, stops you committing yourself, and therefore you don't do the practice. And there's three areas usually of doubt. First of all, in the actual teaching itself, that it's not going to deliver. There's doubt in the teacher, of course. Don't look at me like that! But the big one, of course, is usually doubting oneself. Everybody else can do it, but I can't. And that's often a big one for a lot of meditators. They have a certain ground faith in the teaching and they see how it works. And they usually have a certain faith in whatever teachers they meet, but they're usually about themselves saying, I can't do it, you see.

So doubt is pernicious. You have to be very careful with doubt. It can really destroy your spiritual life. So whenever doubt comes up, you have to really turn on it, you see, and feel the doubt and really not do what it says, you see. Very careful about that self-judgment — very undermining. That's not only in the spiritual life, is it, it's anything, isn't it? I mean, if you start a job and you doubt you can do it, you won't be able to do it. You just undermine yourself. So whenever doubt comes up, you always have to make that leap of

faith, you see — yes I can. Do you see what I mean? To hell with it, yes I can, you see. So beware of doubt if you do suffer from it a lot. Some people do, some people don't. These hindrances vary from people to people. Everybody has their own little constellation of horror which they have to work out. That's our *kam ma*, you see.

So I hope that's given you some pointers when it comes to the hindrances. The last thing, of course, to say is what happens when we feel peaceful and wonderful and we feel that everything's going perfectly well? Well, don't rest on our laurels. That's the big thing. You don't say, ah, finally a bit of peace, and you sink into the peace and you're just indulging peace now. So when it goes, you get really frustrated. Why can't I be peaceful like I was yesterday?

So when there's a calmness comes, when there's a certain clarity comes, when the meditation is, as we would say, it is good, right? In fact, remember, in terms of the process of enlightenment, even should we spend a whole hour just coming off these thoughts, that's good meditation. That's the practice. But even so, there are times when there seems a certain concentration comes, a clarity, a quietness, a stillness and all that, you see. Well then, you see, really use that to begin to penetrate the breath, you see. Because that's what you're left with. There's not much else when you're completely quiet. The only thing that's going on tends to be the very subtle movement of breath.

So you go into that and you're looking at it very closely, very intently, trying to see the exact beginning of the in-breath, the exact ending of it, the exact beginning of the out-breath, the exact ending of it. And where you're driving that consciousness is to the point where mind contacts matter. And it's right there that we can see especially these qualities of transience, impermanence, rising and falling, and the insubstantiality, this not-self. That's when it becomes very apparent.

Now, such is our state of delusion, such is our ignorance, that it just isn't good enough to see it once. You've got to really keep seeing it and seeing it and seeing it, and very slowly the penny drops. Only occasionally does a person have one of these blowout kenshōs or satoris. The normal progress, normal spiritual progress is just this wearing away — this Chinese drip. And slowly we begin to perceive, slowly begins to turn the way we see things. And in turning the way we see things, the personality begins to change, the relationships begin to change. So it's a very, for most of us, a very slow process.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.