Dullness, Lethargy, Restlessness and Pain

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 58:28

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambha sambuddasa.

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

The last time I spoke it was about the bit where the Buddha becomes enlightened and is attacked by Mara and then eventually overcomes that attack and becomes liberated. What I mean to do is just go back a little bit and really discuss this fellow Mara.

So there were nine storms: the wind, the rain, the rocks, the missiles, the embers, the ashes, the sand, the mud and the darkness. And when they approached the Buddha or the Bodhisattva, he was either untouched or they turned into garlands, flowers, sandalwood powder, banners and light. These of course refer to hindrances or what's called hindrances.

The Buddha's own image for these hindrances are like a pool of water. So the mind is like a pool of water. And if it's discoloured with all various different colours, kaleidoscopic, then you can't see into it. You can't see into it because you're enchanted by these colours. If the water's boiling, then that's an image of hatred and anger. If it's covered over with mosses, that's the effect of dullness and lethargy. And if the wind blows across the pool and makes the waves, then that's an image of restlessness. And if it's turbid and muddy, that's the insidious pervasiveness of doubt. That's the Buddha being a little poetic.

But for us, the defilements when they arise are to be acknowledged as our trainers. They must be embraced as friends. They've come to help us to develop our perfections. And we can say that the greater the defilement, the greater the potential for perfection. The more horrible you are, the more wonderful you'll become. So there's hope even for people like Hitler and Stalin. Heavens, they might become Buddhists.

One of the things when we hit these hindrances is that we don't know our virtues until they're tested. And I'm reminded of a book I read many years ago by a man called Brian Keenan who was an Irish fellow and he was one of the many who got kidnapped in Lebanon during that time and his book An Evil Cradling is well worth reading because he really went through some horrible stuff and I heard an interview with him and the usual question was you must be very strong to undergo these things you must have had a tremendous power inside you and he insisted that it wasn't so and that other people found similar strengths. I mean, there were one or two who broke down, who broke, but generally speaking, we have this inner virtue which we don't know until we're tested.

So when these defilements come up, we have to see them as testers, trainers, teachers, friends. What I want to do rather than go through them in the usual order is just take the ones that we normally suffer from. And I want to do it for a little while and then I want to answer these questions. The question sheet that I put up didn't get filled very quickly. So most of the questions come from people who've left. So I'm hoping that I can telepathically send it to them as I speak.

So the first big one that we hit usually when we come to retreat is the old dullness and lethargy. The old sloth and torpor. And we have to understand why it is that we have so much of it. So the first reason is, of course, that we like sleeping. We indulge in it, Sunday morning, rollover, cup of tea, newspaper, roll back over, the beach, say no more. So all these times that we have longed to sleep, to rest, for no reason at all apart from that it's a sweet thing to do, builds up that conditioning of seeking happiness in oblivion. That's what we're doing.

And the fact of the matter is that in oblivion there is no suffering. Correct? There's no suffering. In oblivion there's no suffering. It's only when you wake up that you realise that it hasn't worked.

But the other reason that we tend to fall asleep, is of course that we're turning away from something, we're pushing something away. So we feel depressed, we feel down, we feel a bit anxious. And you just lay out on the couch and off you go. And here are the two great *tanha*s, the two great cravings. The craving of *bhava*, the craving of becoming, so we want to become oblivious to the world. And *vibhava-tanha*, the craving to annihilate ourselves, which takes us towards suicide. So, when we understand that these are at the root of our problem, then at least we have some basis in which to really argue with ourselves, to really confront these feelings when they come up, no matter how heavy they are.

Now, there's a story of Moggallana. Moggallana had just met the Buddha and, not surprisingly, the big thing that he suffered from was sloth and torpor. So he went to the Buddha and the Buddha gave him nine things to do. He said, first of all, when the first sign comes, he said, take no notice, just lift the spine, put more energy into the practice. If you're still coming, then consider the Dharma. Recognise the danger of the hindrance. Build up some wholesome fear, you might say. A dread of consequences. And that should lift a bit of energy.

If that doesn't work, recite the Dharma. Now, if you don't know any Dharma, then you can recite anything, just to keep you awake. This is an effort just to keep awake, remember. Then he said, if that doesn't work, rub your ears. So he must have known about acupuncture points. And if that doesn't work, he said, rub your legs. And if that doesn't work, get up and wash your face in cold water. And if that fails, he said, open your eyes. You must have opened your eyes before, but somewhere along the line you can open your eyes. And then if that doesn't work, you can create a light source in your mind. Only people who have practised *jhana*, I should think, can do that. And then finally, walk up and down.

Now, the thing here is that what he's saying is don't give up easy. He's given nine different ways in which to overcome, try to work against that desire to fall asleep. Now in terms of our practice, we can simplify

that. So yes, when those first feelings come, you have to recognise them fairly quickly and just lift up the body. Sometimes they go. It's just a bit of not enough energy around and it's just moving us towards sleep.

Then if that doesn't work, just open your eyes, let a bit of light in. The other one that I've tried is hands on your head. Not on top of your head, it hurts your neck. Something like that. You ever tried that? It works. Of course, if it fails, you tend to move forward pretty quickly. It would be dangerous. But generally speaking, you catch yourself.

Then, if that doesn't work, you stand up. And if you feel you're going to fall over, then you have to walk. Now, when you walk, don't do the slow walking meditation. What you want to do is just gently walk up and down. Because what we're trying to do is refuse to fall into that temptation. Whatever the rule is, whatever the hindrance is telling us to do, we must do exactly the opposite. So if these hindrances are saying, look, fall asleep, have a little kip, a power nap, that's what you need. And you say, no way, I know you, Mara. That's the mud that he threw at the Buddha. And you stand up against it, you won't do it. You have to resist, no matter what.

And you don't fight it. If you find yourself fighting it, of course, then you're pushing a lot of turbulence back into the system. Then it becomes a struggle and you just get a headache. So it's a case of just being with it, of allowing it to be there. When you walk, when you walk up and down with it, for instance, just imagine you're just taking a big fat dog for a walk. He's dragging it with you, that's all. Come on, come on.

Now, you can go to extreme levels to overcome sloth and torpor. There's a story, and I can't remember where I picked it up from, where a monk was rather desperate about it all, and he sat against a pole and tied his head to it. Unfortunately, he fell asleep. When they came in, they thought he'd hanged himself. He's actually fallen asleep.

The other thing you can try is to sit near a wall. And when you go forward, you definitely wake up with that last little crack on the head. Unfortunately, as I found anyway, it doesn't seem to help very much. You've got very strong torpor. You do wake up, as it were, but then eventually, if it's really bad, your body does tend to collapse and you really knock the wall. And after a week of this, I got this feeling there was a bit of brain damage going on. I gave up on it.

But when I got to my *kuti*, my hut, I found that I used to sit under a net, a mosquito net. I used to find that just that, just that little touch on the head from the mosquito net was enough to just keep me up. These are only suggestions, you understand.

I was at a retreat years ago and a big tall man was standing next to me and we were meditating and this almighty crash he had actually fallen over, he had keeled over so there's a you have to use a bit of common sense somewhere when we went over to help him he refused to be helped

And there was another occasion when this was when I was a lay person. There was another occasion when I was a monk. I was in Penang and they've got a beautiful centre there. And this young monk, he

was a German fellow, very tall, big fellow. And he would get up with us at two o'clock, would you believe, to do the meditation. And he'd do walking meditation at the back of the hall. And there was this, again, this enormous crash. And he'd walked into a painting. It was lucky it wasn't a window. Very embarrassed. None of us got up, by the way. We all just noted here and here.

So, obviously, you have to use a bit of common sense with these things. But what do you do? What do you actually do when these things come? I mean, what's the practice there? So it's to investigate it, isn't it? So first of all, there's usually that reaction to it, the aversion, the not wanting it, the want to shake yourself out of it, go for a brisk walk. See, now if you do that, you're suppressing it. If you think you can kick this out of the way by walking up and down fast, then there's a possibility that actually all you're doing is pushing it away. So that pushing it away re-enters the system and then you get more sloth, more torpor.

So, when we're sitting there and this stuff comes, there may be that desire to go there, so that's the pleasure, and there may be that resistance to it, not wanting to deal with it. But frankly, of all the painful mental states that we have, you know, depression, anxiety and all that, this isn't so bad, is it? I mean, I'm alright with it. Gentle, fuzzy feelings in the head. Sometimes it gets a bit like porridge, but you just...

And what the idea is that you wander about. If you keep your attention moving, it'll keep you awake. You just wander about, feeling this, feeling that, around the middle of your head. And then maybe you can come out of your head and see if there's any dullness, any lethargy anywhere else. If there's a bright, if the mind is bright, but the body feels very lethargic, you move around, just feeling here, feeling there. Just wondering if your big toe feels lethargic. Have you ever investigated that? See?

And it's just keeping that consciousness moving, just keeping the attention moving, just gives it that little bit of energy not to be drawn into it. And what we're investigating, as always, is the quality of those sensations, those feelings. Now we can see them from the three characteristics point of view, you know, the fact that they're constantly a course of change. When you're looking at it, the observer can't be the observed, there must be some distance, so it's not me, not I. And again that reaction of wanting, not wanting, which is the *dukkha*, the suffering.

But you can also look at it more in terms of the four great elements. Try and feel its, sometimes it's, we haven't got words for these things, it's all a featheriness, it's lightness, it's dustiness. And just get into it, you know. If words don't come, if you're using the noting technique and words don't come, don't bother with it, just feel what's actually happening there, actually get into it. And that's what we're doing, that's all we're doing.

And in so doing, remember, we're always allowing this turbulence, because it's a turbulence, it's an energy, to expend itself, to just blow itself out. Now every time we fall into it, remember, even when we don't want to, even if we don't want to, even if we do it totally unwittingly, there's always that little moment of impulsion. Remember that. Whenever we fall into some dream, fantasy or whatever, there's always that little moment of impulsion. And that's the *cetana*. That's the will. And it's recreating and

continues to create and continues to reinforce that conditioning. Now, it's not a powerful thing, but it's there. It's there constantly pushing that wheel round.

So when we know that, then of course we get that feeling of putting a little bit of special effort into that practice. These things can last a long time, you know. They can last for days. So you just have to bear with it. I mean, it's not as though it's like that all the time, but it can be hanging around. And it feels as though you can't investigate anything because it feels so dull. But that's because you're not making the dullness something to investigate. And if boredom comes, you note that, because that's coming out of a desire for pleasure, a desire for some happiness or distraction. You just keep going back to it, keep going back to it.

And remind ourselves that when these things come up, in that way, as physical feelings, they're actually exhausting themselves. That's how the conditioning exhausts itself. Now often when we do this with these feelings it might be that as they begin to disappear whatever has been suppressed begins to arise. It might be fear, it might be anything down there.

So the resolution then is to refuse to be annihilated. And with all these hindrances, remember, that's the purification of the heart. So that's an energy. And when it's released, it's transformed. It doesn't stop. The energy isn't dissipated or lost. Remember that in right attitude of the Eightfold Path, hatred turns to love, cruelty to compassion. So there's a transformation going on. And this energy now, purified of that tightness, is there to be used. And it'll come back into the awareness, it'll come back into all the factors of enlightenment. So it's really worth struggling with it.

You know, it's up to you as to how much you want to find out where the point of tiredness is and the point of lethargy, this dullness and lethargy starts. So, if after, say, on a retreat, if after three days you've settled in and you feel settled and you're sleeping something like seven hours, you see, push it back a bit, go back to five and a half. Remember, we sleep in these one and three quarter hour patterns. And then when you do that of course you have to go through three days of misery to get that energy up but in so doing you see something may be being released because we don't know how much of our so called sleep is actually needed and then when that's settled and you're actually flying along on five and a half hours and you feel generally ok with it not that these feelings won't come up push it back a bit more so you can get back to four hours three and a half you see and give it another three days.

If you can do that, lift it up three days, then, you know, really, it's very difficult to go back beyond that. Even the Buddha needed two hours. And on a hot day, on the hot season, you have to have a kip in the afternoon too. So it's not as though we want to do without sleep, but we just want to find out how much sleep do we actually need.

Now, if you knock it back to three and a half hours, four hours, and after four to five days you're still falling all over the place and crashing through doors and things like that, then you come back forward again and try five and a half hours. And then you know where the line is as far as this retreat is concerned. That's not an all-time rule, that's just this moment, this retreat, this is what I can handle. And in

so doing, you're actually gently pushing the system, you see. You're gently, shall we say, squeezing the pimple. You've got to give it a little squeeze and it'll pop, see. So you've got to work with it a little bit.

So that sort of gives us some idea about sloth and torpor. I do prefer the words dullness and lethargy, but I'm used to saying sloth and torpor more. If while you're listening you come up with some question or you come up with a technique which has never been known before but which works for you, do leave me a little note please because I'm collecting techniques. It's my job.

So now opposite to that is all these feelings of restlessness. So again when we look at the root cause, the root cause of restlessness is all part of our indulgence, isn't it? Rushing here, rushing there, getting this done, getting that done, wanting this, wanting that. I mean the whole society is in a sort of constant rush. So we're in that flow of getting things done in order to achieve something. So there's that pleasure that comes with doing something fast and achieving something.

One very good exercise you might try is just—because this is also a lot to do with our relationship to time and time passing and everybody has slightly different relationships to time, psychological time—one little trick you can do which definitely helped me was to get a clock with fingers and just sit there watching it, two hours. Just watching the clock go round. And just listen to what comes up. And all this stuff about wasting time. What are you doing here? You should be out there doing something. And you just sit there just watching it go round. Minute after minute. And the passage of time. The fact that we can't control it. All sorts of stuff comes up. The office can buy you a clock.

Now the other reason of course that we rush is that we are pushing things away. We don't want to look at certain things so we're running in the opposite direction. Often for instance when we feel depressed we'll force ourselves, you know the old kick in the you-know-what and get going. And unfortunately we do that only by way of not looking at something which is unpleasant. We're running away from it so it's a form of aversion. And when we do that we are oppressing. So when we slow down—and that's one of the great things about slowing down—so that you can feel that impulse to rush, rush, rush, move, move, move. And if you just stop and just stay with that, then often when that begins to dissipate an underlying feeling, an underlying mental state which it's been actually suppressing begins to arise.

And interestingly enough, this particular hindrance, restlessness, is the last hindrance to go with conceit. Now, if we think of restlessness as simply just a form of energy being restless, then I don't think that's quite right. Restlessness is anything we feel, you see, which is actually shifting the mind. So it could be any of the hindrances which is making the mind shake. So if we look at the process of our practice as a refinement of the heart, a refinement of the mind, then all these hindrances just get more and more refined until they peter out, until they go out. They go out when the self disappears. So this restlessness is going to be with us right to the bitter end. So we've got to get used to it, so we've got to stop fighting it, we've got to know how to be with it.

Now when you're sitting there, you see, and the body feels tremendously restless, so again you have to

make a resolution. You do exactly the opposite. Even though there are these little *nāgas* coming in saying, move, get up, get out, do something, shift, go take a walk, you'll feel better, see, all that sort of stuff—see, you don't move. It's absolute rock still, refuse to move. And as it were, relax around it. Relax the frame of the body around these feelings as best you can. And that sort of puts a damper on it, you might say. It just stops the energy beginning to shake everything.

And if again you can just keep the mind moving, keep the mind moving around until you feel that you can hold it, as it were, then it'll keep that attention right on those feelings. And if again you investigate the body, parts of it don't feel restless at all. At the end of your nose, for instance. It's very rare at the end of your nose to feel restless. And then just to keep going around and again to see it from one of the three characteristics, the quality of transience and all that, and again to go into it and see what are the building blocks.

Now remember that every time we go towards that point of contact where we're actually just experiencing the elements, the four great elements—heat, fire, water and earth, pressure and all that—remember at that point the intellect has to stop because you've got to be right with it there. So we're seeing things very clearly. And at that point, because we've gone beyond the idea of restlessness—same with all the others, the idea of fear, the idea of sloth and torpor—then that energy, the suppression goes.

Suppression only goes when you recognise something as pleasant and unpleasant. The suppressive forces, *tanhā*, desire, wanting, not wanting, only comes into force after we've defined something as pleasant and unpleasant. If we go beyond that, into the actual feelings and lose that definition, then there's no suppression. That means that whatever that turbulence is, that restlessness, it's completely free to exhaust itself. And remember that when I'm using words like exhaust and expend and all that, the energy is not lost. It refines itself and is thereby to be used. Well, normally it comes back into the factors of enlightenment. The calm, the spaciosity, the calmness, the equanimity, the concentration, the effort, all that begins to get ironed out and reinforced, reinforced.

So when we are working with restlessness in the body, so the big resolution is not to move. Now if you do walking meditation, again if the restlessness is severe, there's no point in doing a slow walking meditation because it's like you're trying to force a concentration on the step when the rest of the body is shaking like mad. So just walk up and down. It's like taking a frisky dog out for a walk. Just walk up and down and just stay with those feelings. And keep the attention moving and feeling it and just being with it. Take it for a walk. But do it gently. Don't start walking up and down like a mad person. Because that's just empowering it. So it's a case of just moving the body gently up and down and just letting these feelings express themselves. Again, remember that they've got a grudge against us. They need to get the grudge off their chest. Mara. Embrace them. Friends. I don't want to sound too new-agey now. Huggy-wuggy normal.

If the restlessness is in the mind, obsessive thinking, so what's happening there? What's happening, you see? The old habit whereby an emotional state is seeking some sort of metaphor to work with. So the

restlessness will grab anything it can be restless with. Doesn't matter what it is. And if you find that the mind is doing that, then that's an avenue which has been conditioned to slip out into these higher faculties of thought and imagination. So if you try and kill that, if you try and destroy it, then of course again you're feeding aggression back into the system. So we just have to be patient, don't we? Very patient with it. You just note it, acknowledge it.

I'm always for really acknowledging it. Sometimes we note something and it's more like a flip away, you know, restless, a little flick. And it's an aversion, you see, and we're not catching it. But if you actually note something, even if you don't use a word, just note it—restless, restless mind, obsessive thinking—and then the second one is like an acknowledgement, like driving it home to ourselves that this is the restless mind. And that stops that reaction of pushing it away or something, and then just noting what it is. And just come back, come back into the body. And again just feel if you can the restlessness which is empowering these thoughts.

At first you might not be able to feel it because the energy of that restlessness has that way out of exhausting its energy. But if you keep doing it, then slowly I think you'll find that you get in touch with that restlessness. And that means that you're stopping that avenue of indulgence. And the more these feelings come out through the body, the more they're exhausting themselves.

So you can take that as an absolute rule until you prove me wrong that whenever these emotions slip into the higher faculties, whether we have meant them to do so or not, they are indulging themselves and they are growing. I mean one obvious example of that is during the day at work or at home somebody says something which is a little upsetting and you just put it aside, you don't worry about it. And then when it comes to sort of morning break it slips up in the mind and while you're drinking your tea you're, "How could they say anything like that to me?" And then by lunchtime you're eating and you're, "I'm pretty well told I'm not going to do that." And then by evening you're ripping them apart, throwing them out of windows. And you have to take Prozac.

And all that's been done, not because you meant it to, because every time that there's a slippage into the fantasy world, it's developing the emotion. That's what the emotion wants to do. That's how it finds relief. If you're angry and you bang the door, there's a relief there. But unfortunately, we've reinforced the habit of being angry with doors. So with that obsessive thinking, it's just real, just constant persistence, just working with it. And every time the anger comes up, the fed-upness comes up, all that, that's also to be noted. And just, as you know, after time, it fades out.

I like these two hindrances, they often move from one to the other, don't they? You can be restless one minute and then you just fall asleep the next. And then you fall asleep and suddenly you can't stop moving. So there we see that actually all we're working with are forms of energy. The image I have is of an internal weather system. So the storms come, the whirlwinds, all that. And it's all the same thing, it just takes on a different hue, a different form.

So those are some ideas about restlessness and again if you've got any little tricks up your sleeve and things like that or you think I've missed something out just leave me a note.

The next thing that comes up, isn't it, apart from those two, is just pain, you know, physical and mental pain. When it comes to physical pain, that's just the nature of the body, isn't it? We can't stop that. Even the Buddha had pain. So what we're concerned with is taking the suffering out of pain, and we find that the suffering is simply our relationship to it. So when pain comes, at least one good thing about it is that it does concentrate us. I'm sure there's often in our meditative lives when we are feeling very restless and all that that we are crying out for pain. Just stick us on a pin or something.

And of course you have to be careful that you don't get—when it comes to physical pain—that you're clear that it's coming from the body and that the body is actually saying something. So obviously when we begin a retreat you can start getting these sore knees, screaming knees. So therefore you have to give them a bit of a stretch, give them a bit of a rest, have a bit of kindness towards your knees, things like that. But even so, it's an interesting thing for us because we are investigating that relationship we have with pain, which is aversion and fear. And the idea is not, of course, to overcome pain. We're not supposed to get macho with it, try to kill it, destroy it. But as soon as we lose that sense of the ability to investigate and to see our relationship to it, it becomes too much. Then you change posture.

Now don't forget, when we change posture, there's a whole thing to be learned there. So here we are moving from a situation where the body is in pain and the mind is in pain, the emotions are in pain, aversion and all that. As we move slowly, the more slowly you go, the more you can see the connection between the body and mind. As you move slowly, you can see the sensations of pain fading out to neutral and you can see the heart moving from being very agitated to being calm, comfortable. So it's just watching that, watching that the mind-body, like the Buddha said, milk and water, they're constantly reacting off each other. So we're learning a few things there by just working with physical pain.

And don't forget that the usual rule about physical pain is that if it carries on after a sitting or after walking, then go to see a doctor, because you never know. Generally speaking, as you know, these things disappear when you get up.

But the other sort of pain, which is, I suppose, more interesting in a way, is the pain that comes from something suppressed in the body, some emotion that's, for want of a better word, blocked or held in a certain part of the body. And again, when those feelings come up, we're employing the same quality of seeing our relationship to it always, and as that dies out to go into the pain to see what pain is made up of. Tightness, burning, whatever it is, just to get down to that level which makes it very clear that the idea of pain is a concept. It's something the mind works with. The mind conceives it and of course there is a good reason for it. We want to know when the body is in pain.

Sometimes I think that we can become—especially with physical pain I'm thinking now—you can become a little insensitive to what the body is saying to us because we become so equanimous with it. You have to

be slightly careful about that. I remember in my, because you can slightly overdo it, I had this occasion once when, actually as soon as I started meditating, I started getting this sort of discomfort in my neck, back of my neck here. And it grew and grew and grew. And I was at that time working with Goenkaji, with that system, you know, a few years ago now. And I went off by myself to his beautiful center in Jaipur. And he's built a castle there, or they built a castle there. And as you go in, it's a rotunda. And as you go in, there's all these little rooms on the outside and the inside. And they're all nice little rooms, you know, when you get in there. You do feel sort of supported by the walls. And this pain was...

was really bad and I got into the habit of thinking that I was just going to squeeze it out of the system because I could feel it was in the musculature. So I began moving my head about and stretching the muscles, and eventually it got fairly wild. Over a period of 10 days, it was really what I would call the lower depths of hell. Often when I walked out and watched the little mice running here and running there.

Anyway, when I got back to the UK, whenever I sat, my head would flop forward. I'd begin like this, but it would end up like this. It was only when somebody complained—there had been a group of monks at the *bihāra* I was staying at, maybe six or seven, and there were two Westerners amongst them. A friend came up and said to me that they were a little bit ashamed that the only monks who fell asleep were the two Westerners, because I wasn't saying anything, you know. I was like this, you see. So that propelled me to go and see the chiropractor.

When he was fiddling about with my head, he told me that my skull had come off the top of my spine. And I said, "What?" He said, "It has." And then, you know, as they do, they get hold of your head, and there was this ten-thousand-world almighty crack. It was alright, back on top of my spine. So you see, you can take things too far. And I dare say that if I'd have carried on in that meditation centre, I might have beheaded myself.

So you have to be slightly careful. It's up to you really to gauge your own personality, because if you're the timid type then you can push a bit, but if you're the foolhardy type then just watch your neck.

When it comes to emotional pain, remember to be very clear in your mind that the cause of it in terms of the external cause—some fright that was given to you as a child or whatever it might be—is not the root cause of that emotional state. The root cause is the conditioning which goes back to the self. Therefore, the memory, any memory which comes up, is irrelevant.

This emotion of fear now will be chasing something to get hold of. So if the fear is there on the surface of your mind and you happen to be walking along and a spider jumps on you, then you end up with this arachnophobia for the rest of your life. So it's always searching for something by way of expressing itself. Well, actually it's an indulging of itself.

By sitting with fear, by sitting with that pain in the body, even though we don't know what it is—it's only

when these mental states hit the heart centre that we can begin to recognise them as emotions. Tightness in the belly—I mean you can call it anxiety but you don't know, it's just tightness in the belly. So long as you get those feelings and the tightness in your body and the burning and all those peculiar things that come up, just stay with them, you see, and treat them as physical pain. You go into it, you get into the feelings of it and just get the feeling of allowing it to blow its energy out. In the meantime, we're investigating these three characteristics. And in so doing, we are very slowly beginning to realise all the time that we are not that. We are not that.

There's one last little story which goes with this from the Mahāsi Centre. It's written in a book where all the healings that went on there over a period of so many years are listed, and there was one particular man who turned up with terminal cancer in the stomach. As he describes it, he didn't take any medicine—he was just going to work with it and sit there and die. As it goes, as I remember it, because I've not been able to get hold of this book since, he was sitting there just watching the pain in the stomach, and there was an explosion—that's how he describes it, an explosion—and the cancer disappeared.

Now, not all cancers are caused by emotional states, but in this case, lucky for him, it was. It disappeared. So that's a very graphic example of what's actually happening when we allow these emotional states, which are in the body, to express themselves.

Very good. So this evening we've covered just these three major ones: dullness and lethargy, restlessness and pain. And the next one I'll try and cover the rest. So I just wanted to spend a bit of time on these questions. If I can't answer them all tonight, we can do so tomorrow.

"Please discuss concrete practical means of balancing concentration, energy and mindfulness. How to gauge what is needed without manipulation, that is, without desire."

When it comes to the spiritual faculties—which, of course, these are your three main ones, aren't they? Energy, awareness, concentration—the Buddha makes it very simple for us. All he says is, if you pay attention to something, the other faculties will rise up to support it. So we don't have to worry about things like concentration and effort. As soon as you make the effort to be attentive, that's enough effort you need. As soon as you're attentive, that's enough concentration you need. You don't have to worry about these things.

If you make concentration an obsessive thing, then you're missing out on the awareness because your attention is always on "Am I concentrated enough?" If you're constantly worried about your energy and "Have I got enough energy for this?" then again your attention is moving off being attentive to being worried about whether you've got enough energy or not. But the fact of the matter is, as soon as you are paying attention, you have enough energy and concentration. And the more you keep placing the mind into that attentive mode, then of course it just becomes sharper and sharper.

So abandon concentration and energy. Just let the awareness do the trick. Remember that awareness is

always coupled with intelligence. It has to be an awareness with a question mark. You can't be just aware. It has to be that wanting to know. And that's what empowers the system.

"What is the relationship of the *Brahmavihāras* to the Four Noble Truths, the Factors of Enlightenment and the Five Spiritual Faculties?"

Good heavens, there's nothing more to be talked about after we've been through this lot!

What is the relationship of the *Brahmavihāras* to the Four Noble Truths? Well, it comes into Right Attitude, and it comes into Right Livelihood, because your attitudes begin to express themselves in what you do. To practice the *brahmavihāras* as *jhānic* states is all well and good in terms of developing our own mind, but unless you can take those attitudes out into the world...

Remember that the Buddha is constantly saying, "Whatever a teacher can do out of compassion for his students, I have done for you." So his developments of the *Brahmavihāras* were presumably enormous, but they had to be expressed into action. And the word he uses is *anukampā*—which means to move towards the other. So compassion, love and all these, they move you towards the other. That's the relationship.

Now, of course, you don't need them to become enlightened—this is the point. These are the merits, these are your *puñña*, this is what you get as we move along the path of liberation. For liberation we're talking about a level of consciousness. We're talking about a way of looking. So this way of looking is directed through these three characteristics of existence. When we've looked in the right way, one of the obvious insights we get is our interconnectedness. And when that interconnectedness is translated into a heart expression, when it moves into the heart as an expression, then it has to be love, compassion, sympathetic joy. If it just stays up here, well, it's not much cop.

I'm reminded of an incident with a cat. I was at a monastery and there was a cat, and this cat was playing around with a mouse. It didn't want to eat it—it had been fed. It was just playing around with it. When I walked in, there was a cat with a mouse and the mouse was dead, and I said to the monk, "What happened here?" He said, "Oh, he was just playing around with it." And I remember saying to him, "Well, didn't you stop it?" He said, "No, it calmed me."

I was at another monastery when this cat sort of shot out and got a bird, and this monk went up and gave it one hell of a wallop, took the bird out of its mouth, looked at it, realised that its lungs had been punctured and it died. He held it up very beautifully with its wings and chanted, "*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā*"—all compounded things arise and pass away.

Now you see what this first monk didn't realise or didn't understand was that his seeing the cat is part of the cat's *kamma*. The fact that he didn't react to the cat's cruelty is part of the cat's *kamma*. And that's what I mean about it being alright talking about the interconnectedness of the universe and all that, but if it doesn't express itself through a compassionate action then it's dead as a dodo.

"What does one do after leaving the anchor?"

I'm not so sure what that—I think that came up in an interview. It's not that you leave the anchor. The breath is your anchor, it's a primary object. So the whole idea about the breath is that it's always there. I mean if it's not there, worry! So when everything calms down, the mind becomes absolutely silent, the body is absolutely still, and the heart is completely in peace—it's happened once or twice, hasn't it?—then there is only the breath. So now the breath is where you centre your whole attention, and it's through the breath that these characteristics are seen. And that's why it opens up in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish awareness, because that's where you hone your skills, that's what you can always come back to, and eventually there is only the breath.

"Can you say something about the little thoughtlets which circumambulate, as it were, the primary object?"

Well, if they're only little thoughtlets, you see, just keep turning away. And as you're turning away, remember, you're drawing energy out of the system into the observing. You're actually drawing it out and putting it where it ought to be. So this is just a sort of mild restlessness, isn't it?

Remember there are those two stages: *vitakka* and *vicāra*. So the *vitakka* is when you are constantly bringing that focus back, constantly bringing it back. You know the image of the bee flying towards the flower. And then the *vicāra* is when finally the bee settles on the flower. So when you get that feeling of being settled on the breath—those are signs of that concentration coming, you see. Not that you are worrying about it. You're just worried about being attentive. And then there's that settling.

So now that's a dangerous point because you tend to think, "Oh, I'm finally there, brilliant." And you pull back a bit and off you go—the mind just bursts out because it's not really settled. You've got to keep working on that until there's a real sense of being absorbed into it, real steadiness, you know.

"How does one contemplate the three characteristics of existence without getting lost in concepts?"

So in the discourse on how to establish this mindfulness, there are these three steps that the Buddha points out. He uses the word *sikkhati*, which means to train. He says, "Train on the breath." Once you're settled, he says, "See its quality of *anicca*, the quality of transience." And then he says there comes a point when there is just enough *sati*, just enough awareness and just enough intelligence for insight to arise. At that point one isn't thinking anymore.

You don't have to think because the intelligence, this intuitive intelligence, has already been pointed that way. All we have to do by bringing up the idea in the mind of *anicca*, of transience, is you're directing your attention to a certain quality. Once it's directed to that quality and you begin to look at it, the thinking stops as you become absorbed in just looking. Remember the picture—for those of you who were here—that wonderful little baby with its eyes completely wide open and its jaw dropped. If you can get that feeling of just looking. And that's the point where thinking and all that about the hindrances

disappears because you're actually directly experiencing them.

So those are the three stages. So you have to direct the mind, and there's that question mark, that curiosity, the wanting to know: "Am I really seeing this the way it is? Have I really seen the quality of transience? Have I really seen the quality of not-self?"

"Would it not be equally valid to follow the flow of breath sensations at the nose tip while doing walking meditation?"

You can do actually. It's more of a *samatha* practice just to keep your mind on the breath. Make sure that you're walking in a very open space. You tend to walk into things when you do things like that. Just be aware of where you generally are.

"It says that walking meditation balances the faculties. Which faculties in particular does walking meditation balance?"

Well, as far as I remember, the normal thing is that what walking meditation is very good for is concentration. If you're worried about concentration, do the walking meditation, because the walking meditation is gross. I mean, you can feel it. You're there with it. And you can use it to just keep your mind actually on the footstep.

Now the balancing of the faculties—presumably means the factors of enlightenment or the five spiritual faculties. Again, what balances those things is awareness, attention. That's what balances them. So walking meditation is very good for that if you can actually do it in a way that you determine to stop whenever the mind wanders. So you stop, collect yourself, intending to walk, and off you go. You don't have to turn around or anything, but you stop every time the mind wanders.

I'll just do one last one. "Can you say more about *sati* combined with *paññā* and where it's discussed in the suttas?"

Well, the main place is the discourse on how to establish awareness: *Satipaṭṭhāna*.

Very good. I think that's enough for this evening. I hope that my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your suffering sooner rather than later.

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