Eroticism, Romance, Love, Distraction and Boredom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 47:07

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasah Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So I wanted to just continue for another session the hindrances, just to go into perhaps a little bit more detail. And this evening I wanted to investigate deliciousness. And the two areas, the three areas, that you can look at particularly is the erotic, the romantic and love.

I call it the erotic, not lust. Lust is our relationship to the erotic. The erotic and the romantic are just part and parcel of the loveliness of our lives, occasionally. And the erotic, just to think about that for a minute. So that's really to do with some sort of physical attraction towards another person. And it only happens between certain people. You don't feel normally erotic to everybody you meet. It would be exhausting. So there's that case of something very particular and... As you know, it's said that, generally speaking, if you abstract, if you separate out the erotic from the romantic from love, then it becomes a bit like eating. And in itself, it's a sort of empty experience. It loses meaning when you just do it by itself.

Whenever I say this, I'm always reminded of Woody Allen's little crack, where he said... Just sex is an empty experience. But as empty experiences go.

So, as usual, when you look at anything which is delightful, it's either because we like it, quite obviously, we like to indulge in it, it brings, as it were, immediate sense of happiness. That's the point. It brings happiness. The whole point about the erotic, the romantic, and love in the general sense, not the true *mett ā*, I mean love as attachment, is that it brings joy. It brings joy to the heart. It's a lovely experience.

But the other side of it is, as usual, that we may also be using it to escape something. That's the point. So that we are seeking entertainment to escape something that we don't like. So things like such a very obvious and loud sensual experience, such as sex, is something that you can get lost in and forget the worries of your life.

So there's always this duality with anything that we enjoy in terms of the self, in terms of how we relate to it. Part of it is just sheer indulgence. We like it. And it creates a lovely feeling in the heart. And the other side is that we may be running away from something.

So once we have that clear in mind, with anything that we indulge in, in those two parts, then as it were,

as you watch that indulgence, as it fades away, don't be surprised that underneath it there lies maybe grief, anxiety, anything that you're pushing away. So that these pleasant things can be used to suppress just as anything else. So we talked about sleep, as a lovely way to suppress things. So here, anything which is enjoyable can be used just to push it away, just gently push it away, to ignore it, for it not to be there.

And because the sexual energy is so related to life, to the life force, any time that death appears or anything like that, there's a great desire to run that way and to reinforce the fact that there is life. Interestingly enough, I picked up a quote from William Blake. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. You see?

So remember that in the Buddha's life, we saw how all that loveliness that he was experiencing with his dancing girls and all that sort of stuff, and presumably his drinking, and the good time, having a good time, that in the end, it's like squeezing blood from a stone. Like it loses its buzz, basically. And there comes that weariness with it. And remember we, and I'll mention again towards the end, there is a distinction to be made between weariness and boredom. Weariness is that coming to the end of seeking happiness in that place. Boredom is just that you're fed up with it for a while you need a break you need a fast you need a diet and then you can get back to it again refreshed so boredom is just a as we say coming from overindulgence and then but then you still want to get back to it once the hunger for it arises.

So in our meditation, of course, it can be, if you don't watch it, these thoughts around lust can be really obsessive. And we have to be extraordinarily patient with that and just keep coming off them and back into the body and just feel the excitement, feel what's actually happening there.

And that business of really acknowledging what's going on, you see, sometimes you might think, well, we're too old for this, we shouldn't be thinking these things. But you're never too old. I think it was Pope John XXIII. I just remember a quote from him where he said the loveliness of being, I think he was 85 or something, was that the flesh had finally quietened. So you can expect to be harassed by this sort of thing until who knows when.

So it's a case of being very quick with that because remember that when a thought arises and carries on, there's some force behind it which the Buddha called *cetanā*. And that force, remember, is not the intention. Force is just a force. It's just an energy form. It's the same as when you throw a stone up into the air. As far as I know, they still don't quite know what it is. That makes the stone keep going. But we call it force.

So there is something which takes... That which is a thought in the head, just an idea, a wish, a desire, an intention. See, that's why we're also being very careful to note intentions and it suddenly flips and you're away. It's gone. You're either doing something or you're thinking something or you're saying something. And remember, at that point, it's become an action. That's a *kamma*. And therefore, you are reinforcing your conditioning.

So here, if we're not very quick with these delicious thoughts, then they just run away and you've had it. And then it takes a time, you see, then it takes time because you've re-empowered that.

A good metaphor for that are people who suffer from drink problems, alcoholics. They can be off for so long and then maybe just out of weakness or a little bit of hubris, a little bit of pride, thinking they're now above it. And it's just that one drink and off they go. Because it's re-empowering an old habit. Of course, in that case, there's a physical element, but it's the same with smoking. Even though there's a physical element too that people can be off smoking for a long time. And then just when they feel a bit down or when they're in the wrong company, they just take that one cigarette and then they're surprised how difficult it is, how suddenly that whole engine is restarted.

So if you see these thoughts coming up, to be very quick with them and come back and just think about what that thought is doing and bring yourself back to the body.

Now, there is an exercise that you can do, which we did partly, for those of you who were here for my New Age Healing session. And there you actually take the image that you've got towards which you find erotic, you see. So it's not lust yet, it's only lust when you indulge it. So as soon as you see an image which is erotic, to actually begin to take the skin off. Look at the parts, just see that in fact, you know, we say beauty is only skin deep. And when you do that, then if you do it to parts which naturally raise a sense of disgust, you don't have to make yourself vomit, you understand. When you just raise that little bit of disgust then you'll see the mind balances itself and what we're trying to do with that exercise is to get the mind to be conditioned so that as soon as a lustful thought comes up the mind itself will change it for you you can make that a habit in the mind to do that.

And by doing that, you're undermining that process of spinning off onto these thoughts. If you end up being disgusted all the time, then you have to stop it. Because that's not the point. The point isn't to end up with disgust for the human body. It's just a little trick that we can play to make the mind flip, you see. And, I mean, I've practiced this myself, and it definitely works, I can assure you of that.

And you have to be slightly careful with it too because you can be slightly unwittingly you can be suppressing see that's another point that we have to be careful of all we're thinking about is thoughts and then we have to get down to the root feeling which is that desire to be at that place which gives us so much pleasure so you have to be quite careful with the old suppression which we know from Freud becomes twisted and ends up in all sorts of peculiar behaviour.

So the thing is that what we want to do with sexual energy, or what we want to do in terms of the spiritual life, is to withdraw the unnecessary energy that we ought to have around sex. And there's a word that, I don't know, you never hear it these days. It's got a bad name because I think it was confused with suppression. And that word is sublimation, to sublimate. In science, I looked it up, I don't know anything about science. In science, it means when a solid evaporates immediately into air, into a gas. There's a special word, sublimate.

And to sublimate means, in terms of your energy, is to divert unskillful impulses or unskillful desires into something which is skillful. So if we have an image of the way the mind works as just an energy system which coagulates, forms a tightness around a particular idea and spins around it like a whirlwind, and that's all we're talking about. We just talk about energy. And if I can draw that energy away, as it were, to something which, shall we say, is more useful or even expresses that in a sublimated form, then what I get is poetry, art, music. I don't have to go that way. I can draw that energy away and put it into some loving energy, some compassionate energy.

Now, you just have to be slightly careful with that because you've also got to acknowledge that whirlwind. So if you don't acknowledge the whirlwind, then you think you might be putting your thoughts in better places, but you're not acknowledging this turbulence. So that turbulence remains. So you have to acknowledge the turbulence, feel the turbulence, and then cajole yourself to draw the energy into something which is more skillful. And there's that transformation going on.

Now this of course became the root understanding of Tantra. That's all that Tantra is. It's just the transformation of that energy. It's just that understanding that all you're playing around with is some sort of energy force and that therefore through certain imagery and even through certain actions you can sublimate it, you can draw it out and take away that habit and what we want to do is get rid of that obsessiveness around these things.

I'm sure you all know that, if lust gets hold of us in a meditation retreat, it's got a tight hold, so you have to be very sharp on that. And remember that it can be an escape from something, a usual escape from anxiety, from loneliness, from all sorts of things.

And romance, that delicious feeling that we get when we fall in love with somebody. And the dreams and the books written, my goodness, and the films, I mean, it's just never ending. It's always the same plot, which is really annoying. It's always, but somehow, we still wring juice out of it. It doesn't matter how many romantic films people see, they love them. So it's that sheer deliciousness, isn't it, of being in love with somebody?

And again, I'm talking now about being in a meditation retreat, when the mind is wandering that day and it's fantasizing about, some enchanted evening. And you're out there on, oh my good, with old Frank Sinatra in the background. And you've got, and you have to see that immediately and go into it, you see. Now there'll be that deliciousness there because of the memory of the wanting to be at that place in that special way with another person. I mean, it is pure deliciousness. I can't think of anything more delicious myself. Apart from maybe the *jhānas* and that's why you have to be slightly careful so remember that again there's always these two things it's delicious, we like to indulge in but it's also an escape it may be an escape, it doesn't have to be an escape.

May be an escape so when we're sitting here and we're beginning to be assailed by these romantic feelings and romantic dreams and you come back and you allow that feeling remember remember that feeling

emotions all these things are all seeking metaphor. They're all seeking metaphor. They're all seeking a way in which to express themselves.

But when you just note romance, falling in love, and you note that and you turn away into the body and you feel the delicious feelings, as they begin to dissipate, don't be surprised if underneath it what you come across is a deep loneliness. Because that's what we're running from.

So it's a case of remembering that so that when the loneliness comes up then there should be this little aha that's why I'm so obsessive about these romantic films and stuff it's because of this loneliness and of course you have to go into the loneliness you have to let the loneliness express itself.

You know, you are unlovable, nobody loves you, you're alone in this world, kill yourself. So you have to stay within those awful feelings, don't get caught up in those words. And then again, don't be surprised that as you sink into that loneliness, allow it, allow it to express itself and let it dissipate. Suddenly you're just sitting there in this really lovely state of solitude. You see, just being at one with oneself.

It's a sense of lack, isn't it? There's a writer called David Loy. He can be a bit heavy because he's a very good philosopher. He's American. Works in Japan. And if you haven't come across his books, do look him up, David Loy. And he likes this word lack for *dukkha*. Not suffering, not unsatisfactoriness, but lack. There's a lack there. And when you think about it, that's just another way of saying desire, a wanting for something.

And remember that the self is an empty thing. Not empty in the old Mahayana, the great emptiness. Emptiness ends up, there's nothing there. It's got to fill itself with something. Sex, drugs and rock and roll.

So, again, it's a case of being very clear about what's happening there, and to stop the mind. When I say stop the mind, you have to be careful not to back these things away. You're not trying to destroy the mind, you're not trying to kill it, you just note it. Now, as soon as you note what's going on, that which has been going on, the thought, the romance, it has to stop, because you can't think two thoughts at the same time. It's as simple as that.

So if you keep saying, romance, romance, as soon as you've said that, the romance is gone. So what that means is that we've stopped with that noting, the acknowledgement, we've stopped the escape of this emotional energy from slipping up into these higher faculties to create this imaginary world, a virtual reality. That's what it is, eh? And if you get lost in that, then of course you tend to throw it out into the world.

So by coming off those very patiently, just know that you come back into the heart and you just feel, feel what's going on there. And don't be surprised if suddenly, as it dissipates, some rather nasty feeling turns on. And of course, as those nasty feelings disappear, then there's nothing impelling this search for escape, happiness in romance and all these things, and therefore the obsessiveness begins to grow.

And remember, as I keep saying, that all the energy we have, nothing is lost in this process. It is actually being slowly transformed. And all these things are transformed into love, compassion, joy, or peace. That's what we're doing.

Now, you know, whenever I talk about this, especially as a monk, everybody thinks, well, you know, he's just a monk. He's against the erotic and the romantic. He's taken about celibacy, so he's bitter. But it's not true. And if you think about the ordinary passage, I personally like the Brahminical path, because I think it's a bit, as usual, a bit male-dominated, but it is the way that you can see how the relationship between two people can lead to ultimate renunciation and then finally a true love and then finally renunciation.

So the idea is that you're a student until you're twenty-five, thereabouts. Then you get married and you live the lay life. You live an involved life. And if possible you have a family—that's not necessary in this particular, in the spiritual sense. And during that time you go through a relationship and go through these particular moments where there's a block to be, there's a contradiction to be solved, a conflict to be solved, and in so doing the relationship gets closer and closer until there's what you might call a real union.

And then around about the age of sixty-five or thereabouts, they're supposed to leave family. They're supposed to go away and live like hermits. And then at the age of seventy-five, the man—and presumably the woman, we never talked about—the man disappears completely. He goes away, tries to lose his caste name. He's supposed to become a beggar. You're not supposed to approach him as an uncle or a father or anybody. And when you think about that, isn't that just the natural way of life? I mean, here you've got the leaves, and you can see it, the early buds, the full blossom, the slow dying, and then the disappearance.

And so here you have the idea of a full life, if possible—you've got to have a bit of luck there—where, through meeting somebody, you form this very close, intimate relationship, which is very supportive. And we all know how difficult it is to get that. And then you work through that until it becomes utterly mature. Then there comes a time when you realise that even that has to be let go of. So remember, the spiritual path, whether we like it or not, eventually, at some point, is a path of renunciation. It's like, whether you like it or not, it's got to come that way.

I heard Joseph Campbell—some of you might know, the mythologist who wrote the book called *Something of the Gods*, and a very well-known writer. And he was interviewed on this and he was talking about two relationships that people sometimes go through. The first one being the worldly relationship and then a change in midlife, and then you finally find your spiritual partner and off you go, and he reckoned that this was a regular thing. So there is within a relationship a real possibility of true spiritual friendship, true spiritual growth, and eventually the eventual path of renunciation which has to come at the end, you see.

And talking about this, it's very interesting how people get a very negative view about marriage and things like that. I'm surprised how many Buddhists think that, for instance, it's not worth having children and bringing them into this life of suffering. And once a young man came to see me while I was in London, and he said that he was having problems with his relationship, which had been absolutely fine, but now

she wanted kids, and he said he couldn't see the point because life is suffering, and he gave me all this stuff about suffering and pain. I thought, why bring a child into this, you see?

So I slowly argued that this was a very special place. That in fact it was right here that all the conditions are where a being can actually make very good, very quick spiritual progress. So I explained this to him. And then I said, apart from becoming an Arahant, apart from becoming perhaps an Anāgāmi, a non-returner, I can't see in the world anything more compassionate than to bring another being into this world and to give it that basic moral and spiritual teaching for its own growth. So he thanked me very much and I never saw him again. Which goes to show that he just didn't want kids.

So I think we have to correct some of that because Buddhism has come to the West through the eyes of Christianity and it's still there as a life-negative religion. As a life-negating religion. And that's just not true. It's just not true.

And then just finally within this area is of course celibacy. And I'd like to coin a phrase from dear old Sir Winston Churchill. Some are born celibate. Some choose to be celibate. And some have celibacy thrust upon them. And we have to say that in the ordinary run of life we do find ourselves in celibate situations. Now for us on the spiritual path, those are times to get in contact with all the stuff around relationship, around this sort of relationship. And that's an opportunity.

Remember, in daily life, here you see there's no point in getting into all these fantasies because it's really just taking out energy somewhere else. But in daily life, when we enter into daily life and these energies come up, and you can see there's no point in indulging them, then this idea of sublimation, of recognising that energy and then cajoling it, as it were, into some other area of activity. If one, of course, makes the decision that one wants a relationship, then have the faith, go with it, hope for the best.

Just one last thing that I had slightly forgotten to mention is that I was very surprised once I did a talk at a marriage ceremony. Well, two things actually. A talk at a marriage ceremony, not for Buddhists. I was just a friend of this—well, he was a Buddhist, yeah, that's right. And everybody else wasn't. And I gave a talk. And in the talk, I simply mentioned the distinction between romantic feelings and real love.

And I said that romantic feelings towards your partner just come and go. Sometimes you feel them and sometimes you don't. Often you feel hate, disgust, fed up, could get rid of the person, all that sort of stuff. And I said, but love, love has nothing to do with the emotional life. I said, love is to do with a commitment coming from a deeper centre that you have devoted your life to sharing your life with somebody else. And that is the underlying motivation. And if that goes, then definitely get a divorce.

So I was surprised how many people came up to me afterwards and thanked me for that distinction. And I could only presume that in their own relationships they'd been utterly confused because they woke up in the morning and said, well, I don't love you. You turn over and you see this person and you think, oh, God, ten years, what am I doing? And you think, I can't live, I've got to get out, I've got to find somebody else.

And it's just that confusion about things, you know.

And the other thing that I might say just on this little level is how I've conducted marriage ceremonies for people who've been in partnership for years. I mean, ten, fifteen years. And all of them, and they tell me of friends who actually go through a marriage ceremony, that there is a distinctive difference once it moves into a state of vowing. Because when we make a public statement about our intentions, that really roots us very deeply in something. And that's why we take public oaths. That's why, say, when the president is elected, he makes a public oath. And that is a public commitment, and the whole of society is meant to be supportive, to support you with that. That's the idea of it.

But that extra commitment—it just, as it were, deepened the whole relationship. Which means that in the partnership, there was always something holding back. Just something holding back. Just in case, after ten, fifteen years, this is the wrong person to be with. Which would be very disappointing. After fifteen years you suddenly decide this is not the person I ought to have been with.

So just remembering all that and remembering that here in our meditation to be very quick with those thoughts because they are, they're delicious.

So the idea of when we find ourselves in a celibate situation is that this is a time to allow those things to pass away. And again, this sublimation so that we can see that times of celibacy and for monastics, the idea is to refine that energy, to take it away from there and to actually refine it, you see. That's the idea of that. And it's displaced into the spiritual path.

I think I've just got a bit of time, I think, to talk about attachment. So this is also a love with a little kink in it. And just think of all the people whom we are attached to—children, family, friends, even animals. You can love an animal as much as you can love a human being. And there's an attachment to it. And the unfortunate thing is that we don't know the depth of the attachment until the beloved disappears. You don't know how attached you are to your cat until it dies. You don't know how attached you are to your mother until she dies. I can tell you that. And this is one of those things that we don't really know.

Now, the only distinction I like to make is that we're not here talking about something evil. We're not talking about something evil. We're talking about something unskillful. When the Buddha uses the word *a kusala*, see there's two words in the Pali, *papa*, which means evil, and *akusala*, which just simply means unskillful, unwholesome, not virtuous. And in terms of the path we're just trying to shift all our conditionings towards the virtuous, so it's not a case of feeling guilty about attachment, it's a case of knowing that there is some attachment there that there has to be some attachment there and say within parents, you see, that's the rebellious teenager, they just want to get away from that grip, that hold.

And of course the root reason for that is that we're seeking happiness in human beings. Now that's ridiculous. Anything in the world to depend upon for happiness is definitely not a human being. I mean, that's really awful. I mean, they leave you, then they hate you. And then they die on you, for heaven's sake.

I mean, there's no way that, when you think about it, you'd want your happiness to be dependent on a human being. I mean, rather a rock. That will stay there for a while. I mean, it should outlive you. You can keep hugging the rock. Or a tree. Love a tree. That's much better. But a human being is very, very fickle.

So once we see that, you see, and we take the attachment away, and then the confusion disappears between what attachment is and what love is. And just to be aware of that. And of course the downside of attachment is that the person becomes an object. They become something to satisfy your lack. That's what an attachment does—I want you to be like this, I want you to grow up like this, you know, to get angry.

And you can see in certain behaviours, for instance, supposing you were told or somebody was told that the doctor said to them that they had terminal cancer. And when the doctor told them that, they begin to break down and weep and cry, gnash their teeth, bang the table, how terrible it is and all that. You think, well, that's very unprofessional. I don't expect the doctor to do that, you see. And you expect them to be compassionate, kind, softly spoken, but, you know, just, as we say, with you in that quiet way.

And when you go home and you say to your partner, I've got terminal cancer, and they reply, well, what do you want to wear in the coffin? And you think, my goodness, don't you love me? I expect you to weep, gnashing of teeth and all that sort of stuff. And so you can see how behaviours change when that attachment comes. And it's a case of just recognising that.

With children, you see, you can see parents, if the child hurts itself—and it's just a scratch and the parent knows it's just a little thing, you see. But the kid's screaming, you see. The parent's very calm, very quiet, hugs the child, everything's all right, all that sort of stuff. But if the parent sees that the child has actually broken a leg or really banged his head and, oh my goodness, then the fear comes out and all that. And of course that feeds right into the child and the child becomes the object of fear. The poor kid's trying to handle all this pain and the mother or father's berserkness. But it's just part and parcel of that relationship.

So, if we find ourselves here in the meditation, you see, wanting to phone somebody, expecting somebody to phone them, wanting to get in touch with some family member, some friend, you see. If you see that, that's a product of attachment. Just let it pass, let it pass. And then there might be that feeling of guilt, of some sort of loss of love, you see. Because there's that confusion between what love is and what that attachment is.

I've got time just for one more thing I wanted to... Oh, yeah. And just to take the deliciousness to that other area of distraction. So be careful, especially on a retreat, you see. We might think to ourselves, oh, it would be nice to go for a walk now. I think I feel I need a walk. But actually, if you sit with that—actually just fed up with being inside. You're just trying to escape being inside. Or you don't want to walk up and down the same walking path anymore. You want to have a distraction, do it somewhere else.

And if you can really let that go, and as it were, draw the space around you closer, making your boundary

less and less, you'll see it has a great force on your meditation and your stillness. Because every time you wander off on a walk, you're in a different place. You're exciting something. Something's arising. And it's very difficult. I'm sure you've all experienced, so we say, even doing quick walking as an exercise, how suddenly the mind will start wandering. And you've walked up and down for ten minutes and you've been everywhere and anywhere.

So all these desires for distraction, you see. So remember that if we really want to get to know the mind and to really get into its turbulences, if we really want to squeeze the pimple, as it were, then you've got to, as it were, stop the input. That's the point, you see. You've got to stop the input. You've got to stop looking, stop listening. Hearing is different from listening. And as soon as you stop the input, then there's no way these turbulences can find a way to express themselves. See?

And the mind starts going berserk, but you keep playing with it. And when that's cut off, what can they do? All these griefs, guilt, fear, the whole gamut of human suffering. It booms out as it comes out. It comes out as these awful, awful, terrible feelings. But that's the purification. That's purgatory. Just hang on in there. And just keep saying to yourself, there is an end to suffering. There is. There's got to be.

So that's why in meditation we're always encouraged to go inward, to stay with what's happening within ourselves. And just as an addenda to all that, of course, is the problem of boredom. So remember, boredom is that frustration, is that getting fed up with distraction and pleasure.

So be very careful with boredom, because boredom will tell you to seek distraction, to do something else. Remember that the whole point of the pleasure syndrome is that there's an inbuilt obsolescence. You can't keep chewing the same sweet. It gets boring. You've got to go for the raspberry flavour or the coffee flavour. You've got to move a little bit to get that same sense of pleasure or joy out of it.

So whenever boredom comes up, you see, you feel the boredom, you don't get confused by boredom on the breath, boredom on this, boredom on that, boredom with food. You stay with the boredom, you see. And the way to overcome boredom is to keep doing what you're doing, repetition. Just repetition and keeping in mind, keeping that boredom, as it were, within your attentiveness. And then don't be surprised if the boredom suddenly disappears and what arises is its opposite which is interest—only this time because you've let the boredom go some wrong purpose has been got rid of. That's the point. Boredom has come because we're seeking happiness in whatever it is we're experiencing.

I mean, our society is really bad with that because pleasure is so easy at hand and we expect to be distracted, we expect to be entertained all the time, TV, radio, the whole thing. And to enter into a place where there's nothing, then you get this boredom arising.

And going back to the Buddha's own experience, remember, after he had become enlightened for seven years, Māra stalked him with his three daughters: sexual desire, pleasure and boredom. See? So there's little boys saying, this is really boring just sitting here, why don't you get on with it?

So, with that in mind, be careful of these delicious areas.

So I think there's just some time to complete some of these questions. Now, unfortunately, I lost the list. I brought the wrong list that I was working with last week, but I shall answer a few more next week. Let me just give some indications to these.

"Can you please discuss the differences in practices and goals in the Theravāda, Zen, Dzogchen and Vajrayāna tradition?" Well the way that I think you'll find eventually, people who have practised, say, even two, three or four of these, is that the only difference is skilful means, that's all. We're just using different ways in order to achieve the same end. What is that end? It's *sati*, right awareness and *paññ*a, insight. That's all it is.

And either you get it by observing the phenomena of the mind, which is more Theravāda-based, or you become aware more of the space within which this is happening, which is that consciousness. And just that begins to separate consciousness out from the contents that it sees within itself. So it doesn't matter. Even in Theravāda one becomes aware of the knowing as a different faculty from everything it knows.

So remember that all these traditions arose as they passed through cultures, and even in our culture now you can see the effect of western psychotherapy on the practice of the Dhamma and it's bound to happen and it's a good thing because that's the way we are.

"Please discuss the pros and cons of being in the breath of the nostrils as opposed to the abdomen." The general or the usual instruction is you watch the breath where you feel it most and that's the important thing because it's your primary object, it's something you want to go back to, it's something that you want to develop a certain stillness with. I don't use the word concentration. And it's something which, when everything quietens down, the still mind, the peaceful heart, and the quiet body, or the quiet mind, still body, there is only the breath, and that becomes the object which you are looking at.

So, keeping that in mind, that the primary object is supposed to be the breath, and at the point where you feel it most, I think you generally agree with me, those of you who've tried both, is that when you watch the breath of the nostrils you tend to lose the body. It's a very good technique for concentration meditations because you don't have to worry about the body, you become concentrated up here. Whereas when you stay down at the abdomen you're buried in the body, you tend to feel more in contact with the body.

The other thing is that in the Mahāsi tradition, of course, the rising and falling of the abdomen is then carried into the rising and falling of the footstep. So that this constant awareness of transience, arising and falling, beginning, ending, beginning, ending, radical ending, full stop, something arising. And so if we use the abdomen and the rising and falling of the footstep, there is just that constant pointing of the attention at the quality of *anicca*.

Of course it still works at the nostrils because the breath is coming in, stopping, going out. But it's not so

obvious as this rising and falling of the abdomen and the rising and falling of the footstep. But in the end it's really up to a person and where they feel also most comfortable. The Mahāsi himself was not strict. He started off with touch points. And he just ended up with the belly and that became the focus of most teachings. It was only I think later teachers who insisted on watching the abdomen.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering even by the weekend.

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