Forgiveness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:02:08

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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

This talk came about because a friend of mine, who's a musician, wanted to write music around the theme of Aṅgulimāla, as some of you may know. The story of Aṅgulimāla is a murdering thief, but he meets the Buddha and undertakes the training and before he dies becomes fully enlightened. So there's hope for us all. He wanted me to write something which he could attach his music to, and having done that I wanted to add something to it to explain the psychology as to how somebody so steeped in evil might arrive at enlightenment even within this very lifetime.

So the first part I'll ask you to do some imaginative work and then we'll do some explanation. Then at the end you can try and have a go at practicing forgiving all those people whom you've murdered and forgiving yourself, rather, and forgiving all those people who've done you harm.

Just try this one for size, shall we say. You can close your eyes and just, what I want you to try and do, and just catch the process of your psychology. Just imagine now, if you can think of an actual occasion in your life, that might be even better, but just think of an occasion now where somebody says something which hurts you. It might be just a flippant thing, like "you're an idiot" or something. So if you can imagine that, and just let the insult come. Now, just catch your reaction.

So I wonder what the reaction might have been. Irritation? Anger? Indignation? And what might it lead you to once you've left that person? What might it lead you to? A slander? A knife in the back?

So now just try something else on a similar line. Instead of somebody saying something awful to you, they actually do something to you. Perhaps they push you, or they stick their finger into you, or at worst they bop you on the nose. Can you imagine that? Can you see what your reaction might be? I would suggest it's much the same unless they're much bigger than you then you'd probably get a bit fearful.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is did that person cause us suffering? Do you think they were the direct cause of your suffering?

So now turn that one around now and just take somebody whom you're going to insult. It might be the same person of course. So as you just make that scene in your mind, you see, offer them your insult and just see how you feel about that. I would suggest that maybe you feel a little satisfied by it. A job well done.

Pleased. Supposing they pushed in front of you in a queue or something. You got rather angry about it and you pushed them out. You used a bit of physical force there. Can you imagine yourself doing that? So I would suggest it's much the same as above, only a little stronger.

Now take that person and let them come back to you and say that they're really upset and you've seen that you've been the cause of their being upset. Now how do you feel about that? A little remorseful, a bit guilty, shame.

Let's take an occasion which is much worse. Supposing you've unfortunately had one or two drinks and you knock somebody over on the road. Now what's your first reaction there? Just play it through your mind. Shock, fear, dread of consequences when other people find out, shame when you realize what you've done to the person, remorse.

That's the end of our little escapade of trying to imagine things, just to get you in touch with all those emotions, all those states of mind that revolve around those actions where we're hurting somebody or somebody's hurting us.

So now, if we just take the process of that psychology, what we have is the Wheel of Dependent Origination. And what the Buddha is teaching us there is that whatever, just taking the first instance, whatever somebody does to us, has to stop at the point of reception, at the point where we perceive something. So if somebody called me "you fathead," that's not very nice, is it? They call me fathead, you see, so what actually happens is that I've just heard these words, fathead.

If somebody, then having heard those words, I take them into myself. I take them into myself and I define them as unpleasant. They are, aren't they? So they're unpleasant. So this person hasn't actually made me think they're unpleasant. I'm just defining them as unpleasant within myself. If I didn't speak English I'd probably smile.

So there's something I've done there whereby I've defined this as unpleasant. Now I've taught myself that when something unpleasant arises I have to get rid of it. I want to push it away. So that's my reaction to something unpleasant and again it's done by me within me because of my past conditioning.

So we can see if we look at our psychology very carefully, the person who's called us fathead hasn't actually caused me to suffer. It's the way I've responded to it. If the person who's just called me fathead is reckoned by everybody just to be a bit loopy, then I wouldn't have that reaction. I'd probably just say, "Oh, well, they're a bit daft" or something. So everything, all the hurt that I get when somebody insults me or somebody says something cruel to me is my own inner reaction. I can't blame them for making me suffer.

If somebody now pulls my nose, or tugs my ears, or gives me a shove, where does that stop? It stops at the physical body, doesn't it? It stops at a sensation on the body. But then, inwardly, I see what the person's done, I feel what the person's done to me, and again, I define it as unpleasant. Again, I respond to it with irritation, with anger, with hurt. But that's all happening in me as a response to what this person has done.

I can't say that this person has made me suffer. They've given me, shall we say, severe sensations on the nose, which I've defined as pain, but pain isn't suffering. Pain as such is just sensation, no matter how severe it is. What makes us suffer, what makes it hard to stay with, is our reaction to it, our inability to be patient with it. So it's the internal reaction we have to these things which is actually causing us to suffer.

So those are your links on this wheel of dependent origination which remember is the Buddha's paradigm as to how we cause suffering for ourselves. How we cause suffering for ourselves.

So now you can widen that out and you begin to recognize that nobody in the world can cause you psychological pain. Which is hard to accept because until now we've been very happy blaming everybody else. Parents, society, Tony Blair, all these people have made me suffer, you see. But now when I look into my psychology, I can't say that anymore.

If we now turn it the other way, I now say to somebody, "you fathead." Now, the same process is happening within them. I can't say that I've caused them to suffer, but I have to recognize what's happening in me. What's happening in me is that I am developing a conditioning of hate, a conditioning of cruelty.

Now I might get immediate satisfaction by watching somebody cringe when I call them "you fathead," but inside me I have this turbulence, this desire to be cruel, this desire to get my own back, the hatred within me. And the effect of that is that, not surprisingly, people start staying away. They don't hang about. They don't want to talk to me. So my cruelty, my hatred, goes into the world and the world moves away from me. And it causes me to be lonely, and if I don't see that, I then blame others for not being friendly, for not being open-hearted to me, and I begin to hate them the more.

I'm in a whirlwind, taking me downwards into a perpetual state of hatred and grumbling and whinging, which can keep you awake. Worse still, if I actually hit somebody or push somebody, then that's a more violent act. And therefore the inner violence is even worse.

So here we have a situation where I think I'm hurting somebody, but in fact I'm only hurting myself. So you might ask, well, what stops you from hurting somebody anyway, you see? Well, when we've contacted the hurt that I feel when somebody insults me or somebody harms me, then even though I recognize that I'm the cause of it, it's out of compassion for the other that you don't, that you are not the catalyst whereby they cause themselves to suffer. So you begin to take responsibility not to enter into situations, not to confront people in such a way that you know you're just pressing their buttons.

So, the whole psychology around doing harm is always centred on us. We ourselves create an inner turbulence when we do harm, and when somebody does harm to us, it's we that create within us our own suffering.

Now, although that may seem at first to land us in a load of suffering is the very fact that we create our own suffering that will allow us to escape it in the end. That's the purpose of meditation. That's the

purpose of *vipassanā*. So you can see these mechanisms that are causing us to suffer. And then you realize that you must stop behaving like that, which means that in your daily life you have to maintain that sense of sharp mindfulness, knowing your own habits.

Even if you respond in an old way, you don't indulge it. Even though somebody says to you, "you fathead," you see, it stays right there at the point of hurt. You're prepared to let the hurt hurt because you know that is your own personal response to such a thing. But you don't allow yourself to begin to fantasize to get your own back.

So if somebody insults you once, as you know, by the end of the day, they've insulted you a thousand times. And the punishment for their insult has got worse. At first, you just shouted at them in your mind. But by the time you go to bed, you're hanging them. You're chucking them out of the window. So remember, it's through the process of thinking and fantasizing that we are developing these states of mind. This is how we develop our states of mind, through fantasy, through this process of thinking. And it's not a great distance between thinking about doing something and actually doing it.

So what the vipassanā or the insight meditation is teaching us to do is to stay right there with the hurt, to let the hurt die away. Now, when the hurt dies away, first of all, we're stopping it developing, but more important, we're actually undercutting that old conditioning of being hurt when somebody calls us a name or does something which insults us, but actually going underneath it so that there will come a time when somebody might say something which in the past you would have felt to be hurtful but actually it just stops at the sense door. You just hear the word. There isn't that reaction.

So you can see that taking full responsibility for our inner suffering using the vipassanā to allow things to burn out and to heal is actually the process of psychotherapy, healing the heart, purifying the heart, that would be impossible to do if you think the other person is making you suffer, in which case you'd have to change everybody in the world because a lot of people go around calling other people fatheads.

So even though it's difficult sometimes for us to recognize that nobody can hurt us, actually, that's our salvation. That's the healing. That's the liberation from suffering once we've actually realized that.

With that, there's the other side where we hurt people. So it's recognizing that even though we can't cause somebody to suffer, by actually wanting to hurt people, we're creating a turbulence within our mind, which is suffering, and we're creating a habit which eventually begins to push people away from us. So once we recognize that the serpent bites back, the serpent is biting its own tail, then you realize that that behaviour has to stop. So again the purpose of the vipassanā is to sit with it in silence to allow it to burn away, but then we have to maintain that sense of sharp mindfulness in daily life so that we don't fall into those old habits.

And what we discover is that very slowly, over a period of time, you know, 20 odd years, those habits of trying to do harm to everybody just fade away. And the opposite takes its place. Nature abhors a vacuum.

We're talking here about transformation. So where there was cruelty, now there's compassion. Where there's hate, now there's love. There's openness. There's open-heartedness. Warm-heartedness.

Just as a little aside, just talking about these things that we suffer. So for instance, we have within us a mechanism that decides whether something is good or bad, skillful or unskillful. We call it our conscience. Now, just because our conscience which is the judge remember judging us, just because our conscience says something is wrong or something is bad doesn't mean to say we have to accept it because sometimes this judge is a tyrant, sometimes the conscience is too tight and it creates a life of dread, creates a life of unnecessary shame. On the other hand this conscience can sometimes be very loose so that we don't feel appropriate shame, appropriate dread when we do things.

So we haven't got to trust our conscience. There has to be some reflection about it and talking to other people whom you trust so that there's a balance in the mind knowing what is good, what is bad, at a basic moral level, but remember that at a more refined level, it's what's skillful and unskillful. And when the Buddha talks about what is skillful and unskillful, he's always talking about that which leads to the liberation and that which leads to suffering.

Those two emotions that we feel, dread and shame, shame is that feeling of loss of self-esteem, we haven't lived up to our own standards, that's why we blush, and dread is the fear of consequences, the fear of consequences. Now when we do something harmful and we feel shame and dread in a sense that is not to be seen as a punishment. That's how people would look upon it. It's not to be seen as a punishment, but as warnings.

When we accept the factors of shame and dread, and they become part and parcel of our psychology, they prevent us from doing things. Because as soon as you think, "well, I'll do that," there comes just that little bite of shame, just that little bite of dread, and it stops you. And it's when shame and dread are behaving like this that the Buddha calls them guardians of society.

You can see from the way, for instance, a lot of the youth behave, that the line they draw about shame and dread is pretty low. They can do certain things which they're not ashamed of, nor do they dread any consequence. So you can see that once these reactions are lowered, you're going to get behaviour which is unsociable. When there's no shame and dread there, then we're talking about psychopaths, we're talking about sociopaths. It's an actual psychological disease.

Remorse, on the other side, is suddenly feeling that compunction, that desire to be rid of all the guilt and the shame and to want to be reconciled with the person whom you've hurt or indeed who's hurt you. So remorse is a natural feeling which comes after we accept that we've done wrong. And in our meditation, we have to sit with that. If you try and block it out, you'll just harden your heart. You must respond to that desire to be reconciled. To go to the person, if necessary. But in some way, that remorse has to be answered.

And it's going through that cycle of guilt, shame, feeling bad about oneself, fearful of consequences, feeling remorse, and bringing that remorse to an end by reconciliation, that there's not only a process of healing at that particular event, but also undermining that whole conditioning. So eventually we don't get ourselves into those corners.

Now what helps us is that our conditioning is always fairly much the same. This is what we mean by *kam ma*. We're always doing the same thing. We're always making the same mistake. If you look back on your life or whatever, you'll always see that there's a trait within us which is always popping up, given the occasion it comes up. And it's catching that right before it comes up and letting it go, not responding to it, that undermines that whole trait. And why do we do it?

Because we've recognised it leads nowhere but to suffering, to our discomfort.

So now we have to go a little deeper because... In a sense, that tells us how we cause ourselves to suffer, and it tells us how to get rid of it. But the next point on the wheel of dependent origination to investigate is that whole point at the beginning of it, which is *avijjā*.

Now, *avijjā* is translated as ignorance. That's how it's normally translated. But in English, ignorance has a feeling of stupidity about it. But that's not really the meaning. The meaning, I came across this word, nescience, which fits it more beautifully. And nescience just means don't know. I just don't know.

Now, in the Buddha's understanding, when consciousness arises, it arises from a base of don't know. And it moves into this body and mind, body mind and heart, and it simply presumes this is what it is. Therefore you form eventually a concept of yourself: I am who I am, I'm here, I'm my personality, my character, I'm my body, I'm my emotions etc. etc. See? That little mistake is actually the fundamental cause for all the bit that we've just discussed.

Now if we go back on that and we recognise that right at the very beginning there's been a mistake, it was a mistake, that if it weren't for that mistake we would never have done any harm, then you begin to understand that at fundament we're innocent. It's only because of a mistake, not because of something culpable, not because of something blameworthy. We just made a mistake.

Now, I'll give you an example of that just from one of my experiences when I was in Sri Lanka. They had these very nasty little flies called Ohopatua. Have I said that properly? Ohopatua. They're just little gnats, they fly in the air, and they have a nasty habit of biting you and leaving you with a very itchy pimple for about three days. And sometimes they even can creep through a mosquito net.

So here I am with these little pimples and scratching them, and I'm wondering what to do, and I suddenly realise that a spider has built a web in the kuthi, in the room, in the hut. So I say to myself, that's it, I've got to get spiders in and that'll get rid of them. So I have little signs up saying, this way please.

Well, within a few days, there were hundreds of them. They were everywhere, all around the room. And I

thought, well, this is really crazy. And it was getting to a point where I was so bitten and miserable that I decided, you know, I've just got to leave. I've got to go up country somewhere. Just get out of these flies.

Happily, just at that time, a friend of mine, a Canadian monk came and I told him, looking really grim that this was it. And I showed him my pimples and I said, look at this. And he looked around and he said, these spiders webs, don't you get rid of spiders, the webs out of your room? I said, no. He said, well, they breed on those.

So here's a wonderful occasion where innocent ignorance leads me into suffering. Now, at fundament, that's all the Buddha's saying. All he's saying is that we've made a mistake. We're never meant to do any harm. And so at fundament, we are innocent. If we weren't, if it was actually part of our essential nature not to be innocent, then how could we ever become enlightened?

Just one or two reflections on existential guilt. This really refers to people who have been brought up in Christianity or a religion which has a god. Because according to those religions, we are born evil. In Buddhism, evil and all that is a secondary thing, which means that Western people can suffer from what you might call an existential guilt. In other words, they feel themselves to be essentially evil. In so doing, you can see the necessity of having someone to intercede, somebody who can save, can take away that essential evil, and thereby find some reconciliation with God.

Now, if you're a Westerner and you're brought up on that, then that will probably be somewhere in your psyche. So that also has to be suffered and allowed to pass away. And sometimes that goes very deep. And when you couple it with the idea of eternal damnation, then that's bad news.

So what we have to do is go underneath that and really accept those sorts of feelings. And they can be extraordinarily nasty, like fear and dread and all that sort of stuff. But you have to stay there, you have to feel it, you have to investigate it and recognise your reaction to it, which is of course that we don't want to feel that. And eventually as that evaporates, that essential innocence arises.

Now, there is a movement in Christianity where they don't talk about original sin. That's what they're referring to. Most of you will know the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But you'll also find that there are movements in Christianity that, instead of talking about that, talk about the original blessing. In other words, the fact was that Adam and Eve were born in innocent happiness. So in that sense they come closer to a Buddhist understanding.

So there is an end to guilt, there is an end to shame, and there is therefore an end to forgiveness.

Just two things that always come up whenever I discuss this. First of all, why is it that some people get away with it? I mean, they seem to die... take Stalin, for instance. He died fairly happily in bed, having murdered 40 million people. And it seems to have got everything he wanted, although he must have been in a dreadful state of mind in a way, because he only worked at night and... I think on one trip he had five trains going, all giving the impression that he was on one of them, constantly in dread of being

assassinated. But take that to one side and just say, well, some people seem to get away with it.

Well, here, of course, we have to, in a sense, open towards the acceptance of the idea of rebirth, the idea that perhaps this isn't the only life we've ever lived, and it's not the only life we're going to live, and that there is some sort of justice in the process of the world in which individual consciousnesses work their way up towards the enlightenment through a process of being born and being reborn.

However, if a person finds that difficult to accept, it's not actually necessary in order to get the benefits of the psychology that we've just been explaining, because the benefits of that are immediate. Through the practice of insight meditation, to seeing that we cause ourselves suffering, and to see that we cause ourselves suffering when we cause others, when we press other people's buttons, is immediate. We immediately stop behaving in certain ways and we feel happier for it.

But in a cosmic sense, this was one of the insights of the Buddha. It was part of his enlightenment, when he saw that people were dying and going elsewhere, and that a great deal of the reason for their going where they were going was because of their bodily behaviour, which creates these dispositions within us.

And finally, there's a real difficult one, which is very hard for people to accept, who haven't come across this psychology before. And that's, of course, the suffering of innocence, especially the suffering of a child. But it is the same. It is the same psychology. What is horrific to us about a child's situation is of course its absolute vulnerability and its inability through language or conceptual reasoning to find any distance or objectivity to the suffering that it's undergoing.

But still, the child ends up with a trauma and in a sense the rest of its life is working out that psychological trauma within itself. And it's very rare, I think, for a person not to have a childhood trauma somewhere. These childhood traumas are not simply caused, are not only caused by people who actually mean to do them harm. The very process of birth is a trauma, for heaven's sake.

So, the suffering in the child follows the same psychology, and that's why eventually, as adults, we can empty ourselves of this suffering. Now, for the person who harms a child, well, now that's something else, because they have to now bear the awful responsibility for that child's suffering. They might not be the direct cause of that suffering, but they were the catalyst that caused it.

And just to give you two wonderful examples that bring that home to us, the Moors murderer, Brady, was asked if he ever thought about the child victims that he tortured and murdered up here just in Lancashire. And he said, if I did that, it would drive me mad.

Now, some of you may have come across a book called The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. Have you ever come across that one? It's a really good book. It's written by a psychologist called Oliver Sacks. And he's interested in brain damage and the way people are. The particular title refers to a man who couldn't distinguish objects. And as he was leaving the office after a talk, he simply grabbed his wife's head, thinking it was his hat. His wife I don't think is all that pleased.

In that same book there's a very interesting tale which definitely says something to Buddhists. There's a man who murders his daughter in such a vicious way that the facts of the case are not brought out in public in the court. They're just too horrific. This man could not remember a thing. So eventually they had to convict him as insane and they sent him to a secure prison for the mentally insane. This is in America. So they couldn't convict him as a straight criminal.

While he was there he acted seemingly quite normal and within a few years the staff had such confidence in him that they let him go out on bicycle rides. On one of these bicycle rides, a car hit him and he fell over and banged his head on the road. This had the effect of awakening, when he woke up from the concussion, of awakening in him what he'd actually done. And so the story goes, it took six months for the staff to restrain and stop him from committing suicide.

So eventually the harm that we do catches up on us and to harm innocence would leave us with an enormous sense of guilt and remorse.

So now we come to... well I'll just give you a final reflection on that concerning harm. There's a very famous simile of the saw which the Buddha gives. And he says, oh monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb by limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to hatred towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. That's heavy, isn't it?

So now what I'd like to do is... I ask you to do another contemplation exercise. And the first one is, how do we free ourselves from a victim's suffering? So from the suffering that we feel when we've been victimised or when we've been a victim. And the second one is, how do we liberate ourselves from the suffering of being a victimiser? So I just want to go through these steps and you can close your eyes and just go through them. And then you'll get an idea of how it might work for you.

So the first one is how to let go of the suffering we feel when we've been hurt. So the first thing to recognise is that to forgive is not to forget. You have to be very careful. If you try and forget the hurt that's been given to you, then all you're doing is suppressing it and it's just working underground and it works as grudges and it just sabotages our lives. When we forgive somebody, we're not excusing them either. And sometimes we feel that if we forgive somebody, somehow in a secret way we're condoning what they're doing. So that's not forgiveness either. Forgiveness is just a change of attitude, a letting go of that hurt, letting go of revenge, and establishing within us that sense of compassion and forgiveness towards the person.

So the first thing, if you now take somebody who's hurt you, it can be somebody real, but not the big one. The first thing you have to, I think, recognise is that there's no need for us to punish them. They themselves will suffer the consequences of their own actions. That's the karmic law. So there's no need for us to seek revenge. And a Chinese proverb warns us, those who seek revenge should dig two graves.

The second thing is to remind ourselves that that person originally has made a mistake. It's by way of

delusion that they've come to behave in this unskillful way. That fundamentally they are actually innocent and they didn't mean to do any harm. Sometimes it's good to have a dialogue with the person in your mind having done that, having as it were corrected our relationship to that person, we can then turn inward.

And just get in contact with the hurt we feel. You can run through the occasion. You can bring up the occasion when you were hurt. Now here you've got to be very careful not to be taken away by fantasy. So you've got to keep that attention as much as you can right at the physical base. The feelings around hurt. The anger that may still come up. The desire for revenge. Try and stay as close as you can to the body, to sensation, to feeling.

Now as those feelings begin to decrease, the next step would be to contemplate the other person's better nature. When all the hurt and the desire for revenge begins to decrease you can then begin to reform your relationship to that person. Try and see their better nature. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Send them good wishes from the heart. And if that's too difficult well at least an attitude of no harm. That's the base isn't it? No harm.

So that, as it were, sets our right relationship with the person, right attitude. Now, in the future, we can resolve not to approach that person concerning this occasion unless we're absolutely equanimous, which means we have to wait for the right time. And then when we decide that we are going to approach them, to almost talk as if you're a mediator. You'll be very careful not to put blame, not to lay it on them, but just to be clear about the feelings we felt. We have to take responsibility for our part in the incident. Takes two to tango. And the next thing is not to expect an apology. That's a presumption on our part. If they do so, well, of course, it's very healing. But it's not important to us that they should express an apology. The healing comes by this inner process.

Now sometimes of course we can't do anything because the person's moved on or they may have died. So we have to work with this process of reconciliation inward. Until all the emotional pain around the memory is just slowly drained away. Don't solidify around it, don't get hard around it, just see it as a process. You can often just sit with an emotion and just say gently, not me, not mine. It's there, I'm looking at it. I'm experiencing it, so I can't be it.

So that's one way that you might try in the future to deal with suffering which comes because somebody has victimised you.

If we now go to the other side and consider some of the suffering that we've been a catalyst to in other people, where we've been the victimiser, then it might be a good start to just reflect on the fact that we are fundamentally deluded, that we've acted primordially out of a mistake, and that we are fundamentally innocent and therefore utter forgiveness of ourselves by ourselves is possible.

Then we have to convince ourselves that of course we do have a responsibility. We did play a role in

causing that person harm, we were a catalyst. A catalyst in chemistry is something which causes a change, causes a change between two chemicals, but itself doesn't change. So the word I might have said to somebody doesn't change, or it just hits the same space, but it creates within the other a whole sequence of psychological events that causes them suffering. We have to take responsibility for that.

Sometimes we know how to press somebody's buttons too. We enjoy doing it. But when we do this we have to be careful not to take on false guilt. We're taking on false guilt if we take on their personal suffering.

So now we make resolutions not to do that again. So I was very careful about resolutions because you know the old phrase that the path to hell is paved with good resolutions. So it has to be realistic. These behaviour patterns are deeply ingrained. They've come to us over a long time. So we shouldn't be surprised if we keep making the mistake over and over again. So we have to accept that this process is going to be repeated and repeated and repeated. And what we're hoping is that given a length of time, the behaviour lessens, eventually dies away. But we still have to make these resolutions, these determinations.

And that determination has to be one of being really awake, really mindful. The alarm bell should go off whenever we enter a situation where we know we normally do something stupid, something silly, something unskillful.

Then there's the usual business of sitting with the remorse, the shame, the guilt which is in our hearts. So that's part of the process of *vipassanā* insight meditation. We can do that. And we can watch them as a process. We can see that if we push guilt away, push shame away, or push remorse away, that causes us more suffering. So there we're catching this process of how we cause ourselves to suffer.

We can so distance ourselves from those emotions within us that they become very objective. There's shame. There's the feelings of shame. There's the feelings of guilt. And just watch them as a process. Don't get involved by way of identity or possessing them. They're not me, not mine. These are the things that insight meditation teaches us.

Two of our most powerful reasons for hurting people is jealousy and hatred. All forms of hatred. So jealousy isn't just a simple covetousness. It's not just wanting what the other person wants, what the other person has. It's wanting what the other person has and hating them for having it.

So the antidote to that is having sat with that for a while to begin to rejoice in the other person's good fortune. This is what we mean by sympathetic joy. And that's a contemplation. When somebody wins the lottery, you rejoice for them. You're happy that a bit of the pound you spent went to their fortune. When your friend who went with you for the same job gets the job, you rejoice for them. This sort of thing undermines jealousy.

Hatred is undermined by seeing the other person in a different light. As we said before, to actually bring

to mind their good qualities, so there's a balance of attitude towards them. And then finally, if it's possible, to meet with the person and express our remorse, express our sorrow. In the Visuddhimagga it also suggests that we offer them a gift when it's appropriate.

Now supposing at work you'd had a bit of an upset with somebody and you'd gone through this exercise. When you go to work and you're walking through that door of a corridor and they see you at the end of it, our ability to tell where people are at is very refined. We know from a person's body language, we know from what's on their face, even at quite a distance, whether they're friend or foe. And this person may be feeling themselves still hardened by what they did, or they may feel remorse themselves, or they may feel a desire to be reconciled rather. Just by having that attitude, it'll show on our face, it'll show on the way that we walk. So that they know there's a desire in us to be reconciled. So these things are really very important preparatory exercises, so that when we actually meet up with people whom we've hurt, they're open to our apology.

Now the fact is that, generally speaking, unless they've been fortunate enough to come to the Buddha's teaching about pain, they will definitely blame you for the suffering they're suffering. That's what they do. That's what people do. Now, that doesn't mean to say you have to take on their suffering, but there's no point in going into a great dissertation about how they're causing themselves suffering and that your insult didn't actually cause them to suffer. That won't do at all. All they think you're doing is trying to escape your responsibility.

So we apologise. That's not a problem. We apologise, but in our hearts we apologise for our part in the process. That's enough. You don't have to explain anything.

What happens now if the person refuses to forgive, harbours vengefulness, resentment? What can we do about that? We don't have an option, really, do we? We have to accept that this person now sees themselves as an enemy. So that will also create a reaction within us, maybe fear, maybe also a desire to set up battle formations. But because of this psychology they can't actually do us any harm. Outside they might, they might slander us, they might undermine us in all sorts of ways, but inwardly they're not doing us, they're not causing any suffering. So often when you get a person like that, it's often best just to stay out of their way. Because even the sight of you raises hackles. And hopefully there comes a time when you can be reconciled.

It also takes a bit of philosophy to recognise, well, when you do something into the world, you never know what the consequences are going to be, because it enters into a situation over which we don't have control. You may one day say something flippant to somebody, and they take it, they laugh it off, and nothing ever comes of it, because they're a forgiving type. You may say the very same thing with the same sort of slight sarcastic joke and somebody takes it as a personal hatred and off they go on a vendetta. From your point of view it's the same input into the world but you hadn't a clue it was going to come back to you. So when something comes back to you which seems to be completely inappropriate to what you did,

then that's a lesson to understand.

Finally, I'd like to leave you with a little exercise, which at the moment I've called four steps to determination. So when you see in yourself a trait which you don't like, then you have to make a determination, you have to go through something of this nature to undermine that particular trait.

So supposing you do have a certain sarcastic twist to the way you say things. So the first thing is that you have to convince yourself that you can undo that particular conditioning. So you have to say to yourself, I can. You have to keep saying that until you convince yourself that you're able to do it, just by letting it go, just by not indulging it, the habit will die out.

Then you have to reinforce that can-do with a sense of ought, a sense of responsibility, taking one's responsibility for one's own self. Now, these words like ought, must, have to, tend to be looked down upon, especially in psychotherapeutic circles, because they cause further blame, they cause a further guilt when you don't fulfil what you said you would do. But that's only when it's imposed upon us. If we ourselves take responsibility, then they become ours, so it's easy to do it.

So I ought to do it for my own benefit and others is an act of compassion on my part. It's a compassion towards myself and a compassion to others. I'm motivated to do what is good for myself and other people. So that ought is not something which is going to cause any trouble.

Then you've got to convince yourself that you want to do it. And you may find that a bit of a sticking point. So you've got to cajole yourself. You do want to do it. You have to convince yourself to give up a habit which you don't want.

And then finally when you feel there is that desire to give it up, a real committed desire, then you have to empower it. You have to say, I will. I will. And then you make the decision that whenever that particular trait comes up, I will resist it. I will resist it.

So these four stages of convincing ourselves that we can do it, that it's our responsibility for the benefit of ourselves and others, that we actually do want to do it, and that we will do it, you'll find I think fairly powerful in helping you to get rid of unwanted traits in our personalities.

The opposite is also true. It works for positive. So if you want to become more generous, you have to convince yourself that you can be, that you ought to be for your own benefit and others, that you want to be—you can be stuck there—and then you will. So any given occasion you'll express your generosity.

I think that brings us to the end of my little effort to explain how it is that we can come to the end of forgiveness. So we've done two major things to understand. First of all, the psychological process as to how suffering arises in us because of our reactions to things that hurt us and because of behaving from an attitude which is unskillful, cruelty, hatred and all that.

Forgiveness

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