Bodhisatta's Training to the Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 59:49

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

For those of you who have just joined us, I've been using the story of the Buddha as a platform to talk about the Dhamma. The first talk was about him before he was born, in his previous lives, and we followed the story all the way up to the point where he was leaving home.

There's one thing I wanted to revisit from the great renunciation. Remember, what drew him out of the good life was getting fed up with pleasure. A thought occurred to me that we often get confused between boredom and dispassion—or disenchantment, disinterest, a spiritual state.

The real difference is this: when we get bored with something and go on a diet or fast from it, after not too long a time the craving comes back up again for the same old thing. That's not the feeling of disinterest that comes when a part of us has truly had enough of something. In that case, even though it's placed before us and time has passed, there's nothing drawing us to that old pleasure. That would definitely suggest a movement in the heart, moving away from the sensual life.

When we refer back to the disgust he felt after the party, when they were all hanging about looking terrible—if we stress the disgust, I think we're slightly off the point. It was the fact that there was no drawing towards it again, no pleasure to be had there, no happiness to be had there. On top of that, remember there were the four signs, the messengers of the gods: the sick person, the very aged person, the corpse, and the person sitting under a tree in some of the stories.

Then he makes the great renunciation. He leaves. There's that lovely little detail where he peeps in and sees his newly born son with his wife. He doesn't go towards them because that would again bring up all his doubts. This gives a human touch to what might otherwise seem like desertion. But he was simply empowered to go.

There are many times when people are called away from family life—in war and situations like that. When I was thinking about this, I remembered that somewhere in the 1980s, the British government decided to position American missiles at Greenham Common, and there was a huge uproar about that from a certain section of the population. It became an encampment taken over by women. Some of them were there for two years. I remember one woman being interviewed who had left a young family—not very young, they were ten, twelve, thirteen. So there are times when things are even more important than our families.

For the Buddha, or the Bodhisatta as he was then, there's that drawing, that calling. And there may be times in our lives when we get that feeling of wanting to go deeper into the practice. We have to honor that as best we can.

When I was in Sri Lanka, there was a young girl who would tell her father that in the evening, whenever he went to bed, she would go up to the deva realm. In the deva realm there were shrines where the Buddha and other beings would appear and give teaching. She was collecting notes for a book on the Buddha. The father, of course, would humor her. She wasn't six or seven—she was eight, nine, ten.

I think it was ten when she came to our monastery. She had gotten fed up with her parents not believing her. So one night she said to them, "I'm off now." And right there before their very eyes, she rose up and disappeared. The father and mother then thought this was very strange. When she reappeared, they went visiting monasteries with her and ended up at Kanduboda.

I wasn't there for the interview, but I heard the little cassette they made of it. She said exactly what I've said to you. She wouldn't bow to monks because she was an Arahant. When they asked her about meditation, she seemed to know what it was—there was no problem there. She said she'd come down really to look after her grandfather; that's why she'd taken rebirth.

The reason I mention this is that in the book she was writing, the Buddha turned back six times before he finally made the decision to cross the Rubicon and make the big detachment.

When you read the scriptures, you always get this coming in of what we might call the supernatural—that which is above what we would consider to be nature. These days, of course, we tend to dismiss all that. But it is right there within the scriptures. This is really just to contemplate that the spiritual life does ask us to renounce things that we truly love. It can be very difficult, but once that seed is within you, once you know you've got to go, then you've got to go.

So now he's left, he's cut his hair off, and his horse has died from sheer grief—poor old Kantaka. He's put on the rag robes and he goes off to his first two teachers, two yoga teachers: Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta.

Remember that his big quest is: Is there an end to suffering? Is there an end to unsatisfactoriness? Is there an answer to why we're conscious and why we should be suffering because we're conscious?

Both of these teachers train him in what we now call the jhānas.

So the first teacher, Alara Kalama, took him up to the third arupa jhana, and Udaka Ramaputa took him to the end. He completed the four rupa jhanas and the four arupa jhanas. On both occasions, his teachers were so taken by his adeptness at entering and re-entering these jhanas that they both declared him their equal and invited him to come and teach alongside them. And on both occasions, he of course said no. The jhanas hadn't answered his fundamental problem.

So what is it about the jhanas that doesn't answer the problem of suffering?

When we practice jhana—and it's becoming more fashionable now—we should understand what we're doing. When I came into Buddhism, jhana practice was a definite no-no. You didn't do things like that. The Zen school I was in called it "ghetto Zen"—bad, bad Zen. And everybody else, from Ajahn Sumedho right through to the Mahasi tradition, rather put you off it. But these days it's coming back in, I think through the work of Leigh Brasington and especially perhaps Pa Auk Sayadaw.

So what is it about the jhanas that makes some schools avoid them? It's because the jhanas are about creating a state of mind, just as we do when we see a good film or have a good meal. You're trying to create a beautiful environment within ourselves. That's what it's about. Because that's where the pain is, that's where the suffering is—inside us. So we seek pleasure often, we seek distraction often, in order just to get away from the pain inside us. Even here in our meditation we might find ourselves walking simply because we just don't want to sit anymore, it's too painful. Even small things can be little distractions for us.

The jhanas are about developing a state of mind, and there are many ways you can do it. But why can this become a path that takes you away from the deeper practice? It's because when a person is truly adept at the jhanas, when they can just turn it on, that state stays with them all day. It's not that they go into deep absorption continuously, but the mental state stays with them. The teacher of jhana knows when a student is becoming adept—when even if you were to pull their ears and box them around the nose, they're still very happy. They're not touched by it because their heart is gleaming with happiness and joy. It's that telltale sign that the citta, the heart-mind, is being lifted up to that level.

People in ordinary daily life might do something similar, on a slightly different level. Somebody who is tremendously interested in what they're doing—their lives are empowered by that interest, or empowered by being in power. Business people who have a goal and are driving themselves toward it can often lift themselves to that level of energy and commitment whereby they never drop. Until, of course, the business fails. And then they drop.

And that really is the point about the jhanas. When the jhanas go down, what comes up is the same old Siddhartha Gautama. That's what he discovered—that while he was in this state and could maintain it, he actually hadn't rooted out his emotional problems. He could see deeply that when you come out of that state, you're back to where you were.

With that disappointment—and it must have been disappointing for him—we can presume that as a layperson in the palace he had explored all these things both theoretically, with the Brahmins and others, and that now he was into the practice. This was the practice that everybody said was where it's at. Remember, the idea of the jhanas wasn't simply to feel happy now. It was that when you're reborn, you get reborn in the jhana realms, and those last for eons upon eons, endless times. As you go up the jhana scale, you enter into the lower heavenly realms, then into the arupa realms, and finally into the great

Brahma realms, where you can hang about for a very long time. But then, of course, it drops. However, because of your good karma, you probably only drop to being a human being, where you do the jhanas again, rev them up, and go back up. In terms of how people thought in those days about this constant round of birth and rebirth, at least that seemed to be a viable answer. It was much happier up there in those realms than in this one.

Anyway, he's disappointed with that, and the next thing he does is go off to practice these mortifications. Now, I've never been able to really find what the understanding behind the mortifications was. I've tried to look at it, but the only reason I can think of—which is also taken from the Christian tradition—is that the reason why we're unhappy is because of the body. It's the body that lets in images. It's the body that has greed. It's the body that has lust. We feel it in the body. So if we can somehow control the body, then this would liberate the mind.

All these things the Buddha did—he said he starved himself until he was down to a grain of oats or something every day. He got to the point where he could hold his spine through his stomach. That very fierce asceticism, I think, was based on this understanding: that if you reduce the appetite of the body, then somehow the citta is liberated.

Now, for those of you—I'm sure all of you—who have done a ten-day fast or longer, perhaps a month fast, you'll know that the first three days are absolutely horrible while the body's clearing out its rubbish.

But then after that, you do enter into this very clear, very easy state. And of course, no feelings of hunger because the body's eating itself. So in that clarity, it's much easier to do certain practices. And I've always presumed that that's what self-mortification is about.

Interestingly enough, the whole practice, if you look at the words, is actually about self-mortification, about the destruction of self. But here we're using it in that old form of some form of controlling the body.

For whatever reasons there were—and remember that some of these practices came from the other leader who was a contemporary elder of the Buddha, the Jain leader, who was definitely into these sorts of things. Of course, his idea rested on karma. His idea was that as soon as you do an action, you're creating more saṅkhāras. So you've got to stop doing. You've got to stop doing. So eventually the Jain saint starves themselves to death. That's the Jain way of doing things. And there's a presumption that the Buddha followed that a little bit just to find out what all that was about. But eventually, as you know, he ends up being very disconsolate and he just says it was just painful, that's all. He didn't seem to achieve anything at all.

So now we can imagine him coming to a point of despair. He's taken everything that the society has given him in his search, and it just seems to have come to a dead end.

In the story, of course, he's sitting on the roadside when a woman, Sujātā, comes along with a bowl of offering for the gods. She's going towards the shrine and she sees him—and scriptures are, you know,

these apocryphal tales will be what they are. And of course she sees a god sitting by the road, a deva, and she honors him. But frankly, he must have looked pretty ragged and pretty awful. And as she's walking by, she must have thought, "Oh, this poor ascetic probably needs my rice pudding." So she offers this rice pudding—and somebody actually corrected me and said that was a British Raj invention. That is, there was no rice pudding. What there was, was a rice cake, which they have in Sri Lanka called kiribat. It's basically rice boiled in coconut milk, which is then boiled out and patted into a little block.

Now of course, if I had a choice, if I was in the Buddha's position there and had a choice, I'd definitely go for the British variety. And the reason for that isn't just facetious. It's because as he's eating this, or at some point close to that time, he remembers this point in childhood. And what he remembers is watching his father opening up the plowing season by doing some sort of plowing ceremony. And there's something about that watching, there's something about the way he's looking, which gives him an inspiration. Somehow he remembers being in a state, to use that word, which is different in quality to all the jhānas he's done and all the states that might have come up when he was doing the self-mortification.

I was walking through Birmingham Station in Britain, and as I was going up the escalator to the shopping mall, there was a great big poster up there with different pictures on it. And there was one picture which, as soon as I saw it, I almost shouted with glee. And before they took me away, I was able to take a picture. This little picture is what I call satipaññā. And I think it's the closest thing I've seen as an image to that state of mind which arises, shall we say, either just before or just upon the seeing.

And this little baby—you see, all those eyes are completely open, completely absorbed in what... well, you can't tell if it's a she or he, you see. That's the other thing about satipaññā, isn't it? It's not been diversified. And of course, the mouth has dropped. Now, that relaxed jaw is a great sign to us that the thinking mind has stopped, because the connection between the tongue and the jaw is intimate. You may have seen that when you're thinking, there are these little vibrations on the tongue. It's already ready to move.

As children, we have that capacity, just that very simple capacity, especially until around the age of six or seven, of just being able to look. And I'm sure you had the bad experiences I had of having looked like that and your parents telling you to shut your mouth because you look gormless. And after that, you never look the same, which is very unfortunate. So if you ever see a child looking like that, you have to stop very still while the child is absorbed. And if you see a child doing that, there's a moment of complete silence, you see, and then suddenly the question: "What is it?" But it has to be absorbed first.

So, this quality of satipaññā. Now, in the jhānas, there's sati, awareness. In fact, right awareness. Well, it's awareness, shall we say. Awareness never leaves us.

It's there when we're asleep. I mean, something turns us over. Something pulls the blanket over us when we're cold. So it's not as though awareness goes or disappears completely. It's always there in some way. And when somebody practices jhāna, awareness is there—that's not the problem, you see. But it's this other quality that was missing, this paññā, this jñāna, this intuitive intelligence, that question mark. And

that question mark is talked about in Zen as the great doubt. Not meaning that you're doubting the practice, but that wanting to know. That's what he remembers. That's what he remembers.

So this brings also to mind the importance of food. Keep that in mind.

Now, having made this discovery, really sort of enlivened by that, he's got a new tack, a new something to follow. He goes to find this place near the river Narañjanā where he's going to sit. And again, one of these lovely little apocryphal stories—he puts his bowl into the river and it goes upward, against the flow. And for those of you who come to my little morning talks, I pointed out that I once got a card which had a dead fish floating in the river and the title was "Only dead fish go with the flow." So if you think of this magical moment, which is representative of the fact that the Dhamma will always go against our conditioning, the self-conditioning—it's always an uphill struggle, right? The small self, the lesser self, doesn't want to fight it. But you've got to go up, you've got to go against the conditioning all the time. And I'll try and spend a bit of time in one of these talks just revising some of the hindrances.

So now he's found himself a seat and he makes this wonderful great determination. In the scriptures it's expressed: "Let my skin, bones and sinews remain, and let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, but not until I attain the supreme enlightenment will I give up this seat of meditation."

Have you tried that? You can give it a go. It's sort of humiliating, but it's worth doing. Because then you see that to be able to make that sort of determination, he's really built up that power—resolution, forbearance, and all that sort of stuff. In fact, you might say he's come to a point where either he finds the answer to this, or he may as well not hang about. He may as well die. What's the point?

So at this point, of course, he gets the attack of Māra. And this book is the story of Gautama Buddha from the Nidānakathā, the Jātakas. I thought I'd read out this lovely battle so that you get the way these stories build up in that metaphysical, supernatural way. We've lost a lot of this in our over-rational culture, but it's a lovely scene.

So Māra has come. He's a devaputra, a son of the gods. He's not a devil from the hellish realm. He's somebody who entices people. It's like the Satan in Islam. When Ayatollah Khomeini called America "Satan," he wasn't thinking of it as an evil Christian devil. He was thinking of it as that which entices you away from the way of Allah.

So now Māra has come with all his armies. He's really wound up and he's going to attack the Buddha and get him off the seat, because he shouldn't be there. Māra should be there. The world is about the sensual world. It's not about getting enlightened. He's in the wrong seat.

"So then the Devaputra Māra raised a tornado, wishing to drive away Siddhartha with it. Instantaneously such gales rose from the east and other directions as would have shattered to bits mountain peaks of the height of half a yojana, two yojana, or three yojana, and could have uprooted shrubs and trees of the forest, and could have reduced to fragments the villages and townships of the neighborhood. But by the

virtue and majesty of the great being, they lost their force, and on reaching the Bodhisattva they were not able to shake even the hem of his robe."

"Wishing to engulf him in water and slay him, he next caused a heavy downpour of rain."

By his great miraculous power, clouds gathered in hundreds of thousands, layer upon layer, and poured forth rain. The earth was hollowed out by the violence of the torrential downpour. A great flood came, submerging the treetops of the forest, but it could not moisten his robe, even to the extent of the little space on which a dewdrop could fall.

Next he raised a great shower of rocks. Large mountain peaks came swirling through the air, issuing smoke and flames. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into wreaths of heavenly garlands.

Next he raised a storm of missiles. Swords, daggers, darts and other weapons, single-edged and double-edged, came hurtling through the sky, smoking and flaming. But on reaching the Bodhisattva, they turned into heavenly flowers.

Next he raised a shower of burning coals. Embers the hue of Kimsuka flowers came flying through the sky and were scattered at the feet of the Bodhisattva, turning into heavenly flowers. Next he raised a storm of ashes. Red-hot ashes, glowing like fire, came flying through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into sandalwood powder.

Next he raised a sandstorm. Fine particles of sand came smoking and flaming through the sky, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly flowers. Next he raised a storm of mud. The mud came smoking and flaming through the air, fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva and turned into heavenly ointments.

He next created a gloom which was as thick as when four conditions are found in combination. And on reaching the Bodhisattva, it disappeared as darkness that vanishes with the oncoming radiance of the sun.

It's lovely stuff. You can call it literature, I suppose.

And eventually, of course, he won't budge. So Mara then approaches him and asks this question. Remember, all this is being watched by the deities on the ridge of the universe—this is a square universe—continually raising their heads and craning their necks, looking out, saying, "Alas, ruined indeed is the handsome physical frame of Prince Siddhartha. What will he do?"

Then the great being told Mara, as he stood there claiming the throne accruing on the day of their enlightenment to Bodhisattvas who fulfilled their perfections, "Mara, who will testify to your having given away in charity?"

Mara stretched forth his hand in the direction of his army, saying, "All these are my witnesses." Instantaneously, the cry of one accord—"I am witness, I am his witness"—came from the followers of

Mara, resounding like an earthquake.

Then said Mara to the great being, "Siddhartha, who will testify to your having given in charity?"

And the great being answered, "You have sentient beings as witnesses to your having given away in charity, but in this place I have no living being whatever to be my witness. Let alone the generosity I have practiced in all other existences—let this great and solid earth, non-sentient as it is, be my witness to the seven hundredfold great alms I gave when I was born as Vesantara."

And extricating his right arm from underneath the folds of his robe, he stretched it out towards the earth, saying, "Are you or are you not witness of my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vesantara?"

And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand echoes, as though to overwhelm the forces of Mara, saying as it were, "I was your witness to it then."

Then as the great being continued to reflect on the alms he had given as Vesantara, saying to himself, "Oh Siddhartha, you have given away vast charities and made the highest sacrifice," the elephant Girankala—which is Mara's elephant, one hundred and fifty yojanas in height—went down on its knees. And the followers of Mara fled in every direction. No two fled the same path; they ran in whichever direction lay before them, discarding their head ornaments and the clothes they were wearing.

So that's the great attack of Mara, put in a metaphorical way. And of course, those are the hindrances coming. Those are the final shaking of the self, which doesn't want to come off. And at root, it's fear, isn't it? When you get right down to the root emotion of delusion, it's fear—the fear of the loss of this idea of who I am. And that's what it's really portraying, trying to get across that. If you just hold your ground, it disappears. It turns. It changes. It just turns into its opposite.

What keeps him there, what keeps him able to resist the attack, is of course his perfections. Here it's the charity. But in our meditation, it's that ability to stand and to observe those reactions that we get when fear arises, to be with it and allow it to just be there, to get accustomed to fear. And if we can begin to lose our fear of fear, well, nothing can frighten us. But it's that ability to stand still. So even though this is a mythological way, it's a lovely sort of way of portraying what must be the final death throes of the self—that moment when it just disappears.

I'll try to go a bit more deeply into the hindrances another time. But I want to move on to what happens then. He is moving towards the Enlightenment now. And one of the things that I suppose has always been a little disappointing for me—because having been brought up in something like Catholicism, which in my experience was a happy religion (it doesn't go for everybody who is a Catholic), but also Christians and those in the Judaic tradition too—there is this sense of jubilation, this sense of rejoicing and blowing horns and music.

And when you remember this lovely music — say, of Bach's Alleluia Chorus or Handel's Messiah — it sort of lifts you.

Well, I always remember Buddha Day. Buddha Day is the big one. It's celebrating the founder. Everything that even this place here now is totally dependent on this being that existed 2,500 years ago. And so one wants to blow horns and whoop a bit.

So on these lovely Buddha days, especially — I'm thinking more of Kanda Bodha where I was most of the time — the only difference between Buddha Day and everything else was you lined up a bit earlier for food because there was more stuff around. And that was it. Then there were these terrible talks, and then you went away. And that was it.

I want to read out just one more piece, which at least shows you that in the literature there is this mudita, this wonderful sense of rejoicing at this great act. I remember visiting a very famous monk, he's died now, Ajahn Tate, who used to live right up on the Mekong River, at the top of North Thailand. They were building this meditation hall — I slept in it, actually — and on the wall, this artist was drawing a depiction of the Enlightenment. A more glorious picture you couldn't have come across. It was just full of action, like an exploding star with these beautiful colours. In a sense, sometimes we forget that. We forget that actually there's a point where you can rejoice and be happy and have a feast.

So here, just before he becomes enlightened, the gods know that Mara has been completely routed and the path is completely open for the Bodhisattva. The signs go up from one realm to another, and the whole of the thousand-world system is now agleam:

So the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the eastern ridge of the world sphere spread as far as the western ridge. Similarly, the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the western ridge, the northern ridge and the southern ridge spread as far as the eastern, southern and northern ridges respectively. And the radiance of the banners and streamers hoisted on the surface of the earth remained in constant contact with the world of Brahma, and those held aloft in the world of Brahma penetrated to the very surface of the earth.

Flowering trees in ten thousand world spheres blossomed forth. Fruit-bearing trees were weighed down with clusters of fruit. Flowers that bloom on tree trunks, branches and creepers blossomed in their respective places. Lotuses on stalks sprang in clusters of seven, breaking through rocky surfaces and were heaped layer upon layer. The ten thousand world systems revolved and remained like a wreath of garlands tossed about, or like a well-arranged spread of flowers.

The intervening regions of eight thousand yojanas between the world spheres, which had not been lit before even by the radiance of seven suns shining together, became one mass of light. The great ocean, eighty-four thousand yojanas deep, turned into sweet water. Rivers ceased to flow. Those blind from birth were able to see objects. Those deaf from birth were able to hear sounds. Those crippled from birth walked on their feet.

Bonds and fetters broke loose and fell apart.

So this rejoicing — he now makes the big breakthrough. That's the point of what we call his Enlightenment.

There's just a little thing I'd like to say before I leave this: religious emotions. What part do they play in our spiritual life? Especially in something like Theravada, it can get pretty dry, just doing your vipassana. But that sense of awe that we get, for instance, in the carol Silent Night — just letting the story of the Buddha come and getting that sense of awe, the brilliance, the amazing thing. And then shifting it over to consider the Dharma as an actual living force that runs through the universe.

Praise. Adoration. It's actually one of the objects of jhana meditation, contemplating the Buddha. You can get, it seems, to first or second jhana with that. And the sense of rejoicing that we just heard — to bring that up, a sense of rejoicing.

Then of course there's gratitude. Just that lovely feeling of gratitude, made more poignant because this cannot be repaid. You can't pay the Buddha back for what he did. In fact, you can't pay anybody back — that's an idea, paying somebody back. But just being able to receive the gifts. That's why we have this flow of what I call a gift economy — I read that somewhere — where people give each other gifts: the Dharma and sustenance.

And devotion. In the morning when I ask people to devote themselves —

Not so much a hard sort of giving yourself, but more like the heart wants to do it. You have to cajole yourself a little. You have to massage the heart to feel that way.

And one thing that I think especially we in the West have to begin to look at is this whole matter of bowing and what bowing actually means. Now, as you know, there are many ways to bow. The Tibetans do a full prostration. The Theravadans do this bowing like I do when I come in here. And then there's the Zen way, which is just bowing from the waist. And then some people simply come in and bow their head. And then again there's just that blink—it's just a suggestion of bowing.

Bowing, at first, always seems a bit strange. I remember when I first had to do it in Zen. I did it because everybody else did it, but I didn't really get into it for a long time. If you think of bowing as a body language, as a way of expressing these types of emotions, then it becomes a way of reinforcing the action of the heart. It's a way of actually giving it a vehicle in which to express these religious emotions. And these religious emotions are all bound up around faith and trust and the act of giving oneself to the practice. There's a sort of underbelly to it.

Now of course, to think that these practices alone get us to be liberated would be a silliness, but they're there as a support. Some people feel a need for that more than others. The more intellectual you are, the less you feel you need it—but probably the more you do need it. And to find a way of expressing that

devotion in some sort of body language, I think you'll find very helpful.

The first time I went to Burma to work with Sayadaw U Janaka was the only time. After doing the old hard Mahasi practice in a hall, I got the opportunity to visit Rangoon. It was difficult to get let out; you had to have a good reason. So I gave him the reason that I wanted to buy religious books. At that time, to get religious books out of the country, you had to go from one government department to the next to get these bits of paper—the religious department, the censoring department, the export department. Of course it would take a whole day going to see these departments, and therefore I spent the last week wandering around Rangoon.

Walking into the beautiful big pagoda—the Shwedagon Pagoda, supposed to be one of the seven wonders of the world—I saw these people pouring water over Buddha rupas, bowing and mumbling. And I remember distinctly the sentence that came into my head. It said, "Well, I'm not a Buddhist." That immediate rejection of any form of ritual was almost obedient. It was cool and cold, just like that.

But as this whole idea of religious emotions came to me and slowly began to develop, the last time I was in Burma—which was in the year 2000 at Sayadaw U Pandita's place—I had again the opportunity to go to the Shwedagon Pagoda. And it's quite remarkable to find myself not quite pouring water over Buddhas, but hanging around in this lovely, limpid atmosphere.

There's a beautiful temple in Sri Lanka called Kelaniya, just outside Colombo, if you ever go. And if you go there on a full moon day, you can actually slice through the butter of devotion in the air. It's enormously beautiful, with people just wandering around the Bodhi tree and making their blessings and their offerings.

And you might say that what it does is it gives a glow to the practice. It gives a certain glow underneath. Most people try to do a bit of metta to soften the practice, but even these devotional things are very softening and give the practice just that little bit of juice sometimes—especially when it gets miserable, like the weather we've been having.

So these things that I've read out are really just examples of how the heart moves sometimes. Buddhism, generally speaking, will always veer towards that more wisdom base because it's centered on knowing, on this idea of perception, of discernment. But these little practices that we can do just put the heart in the right sort of position, so it moves with that desire to investigate.

So I thought that I would then just read out for you the three sermons which the Buddha gave after his enlightenment—just read them out because they're pretty straightforward. Remember that when he was enlightened, he left searching for his people. I'll come back to that in another lecture. But on this one here, I'd just like to read the discourse on the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma.

And I've done my own little bit with it so that it reads more smoothly, because sometimes it feels stilted.

So this is what I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipatana. And the Blessed One addressed the group of five ascetics: "Venerable friends."

"Yes, venerable friend," those ascetics replied.

"Venerable friends, these two extremes should not be practiced by anyone who has entered the spiritual path. Firstly, the pursuit of happiness in sensual pleasure—this is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. And secondly, the practice of self-mortification, which is ignoble, unbeneficial and painful.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata has discovered the middle way. This gives rise to insight, to knowledge, leads to peace, experiential understanding, to enlightenment and nirvana.

And what is this middle way, awakened to by the Tathagata? It is this noble eightfold path: right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration.

Now this, venerable friends, is the first noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Sickness is suffering. Being with what we dislike is suffering, and not being with what we like is suffering. In fact, not to get what we want is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of grasping—form, feeling, perceptions, emotion, thoughts, and consciousness—are all unsatisfying.

The second noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness is the craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and indulgence, seeking happiness here and there. That is the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving to become, and the craving to annihilate.

And the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering is the fading away without remainder, the cessation of that craving, the giving up and relinquishing of that craving, and the freedom from it—non-attachment.

The fourth noble truth is the path that leads out of this unsatisfactoriness.

Now, venerable friends, in regard to these understandings that have never been known before, there arose in me the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the penetration, and the light—namely, that this is the noble truth of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be fully understood, and this noble truth has been fully understood. This is the noble truth of the cause of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be abandoned. This noble truth has been abandoned. This is the noble truth of the end of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be realized, and this noble truth has been realized. This is the noble truth of the path leading to the end of unsatisfactoriness. This noble truth is to be developed. This noble truth has been developed.

So long, venerable sirs, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths, as they really are in their

three phases and twelve aspects, was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, maras, and brahma, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. But now that these noble truths have been fully realized by me, it is so proclaimed. This knowledge and vision arose in me. Unshakable is the liberation of my citta. This is my last birth. There is no more renewed becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said. And those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while the discourse was being delivered, there arose in the venerable Kondanya the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dharma: whatever is subject to arising is all subject to passing away. And the Blessed One proclaimed, "Kondanya knows! Kondanya knows!" And that is how Kondanya earned his name, Añña Kondanya—the Kondanya who knows.

So that's when he went up and met with them. Remember that they first rejected him because they had this feeling that he'd been soft and gone off and eaten rice pudding—and that was the limit. So when he went back, they didn't particularly like him coming. They thought he was coming to tempt them. But in fact, it seems as though they were so taken by the way he looked that they were prepared to sit down and discuss these things with him. These scriptures, of course, were written after the event.

So then they all went off to get their alms round. And on the way back, having eaten their alms round, they all sat down and he gave them another talk. And this one is the characteristic of not-self.

This is what I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Benares in the deer park at Isipetana. And there the Blessed One addressed the group of five ascetics.

"Venerable friends."

"Yes, venerable friend," the ascetics replied.

"Form is not self. If form were self, then it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to determine form: 'Let my form be like this. Let my form not be like this.' It would be the same with feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself. If consciousness were self, we would be able to say, 'Let my consciousness be like this, let it not be like this.'

"Now I ask you, is form permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable friend."

"And whatever is impermanent, is that satisfying or unsatisfying?"

"It does not satisfy, venerable sir."

"And is that which is impermanent, does not satisfy, and is subject to change, to be regarded as 'this is me,

this is mine, this is myself'?"

"Not at all, venerable friend."

"Can we not say the same of feelings, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts, and even consciousness itself?"

"Indeed, venerable friend," replied the five ascetics.

"So it follows that any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all form is to be correctly regarded as 'this is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself.' And the same goes for feelings, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and even consciousness itself.

"Now, venerable friends, when someone who has heard this understands in this way, they become disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feelings and perceptions, disenchanted with emotions and thoughts, disenchanted even with consciousness itself. And once disenchanted, they become dispassionate. And through this detachment, the citta is liberated. And when liberated, it realizes 'this is liberation.' And they come to know: birth is no more, the spiritual life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done, there is no more returning to any state of becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said, and those venerable friends delighted in what he had spoken. And while this discourse was being delivered, the citta of those five ascetics were liberated from the floods through non-clinging.

So now we have five Arahats in the world.

I would like to read another short discourse as well. This is the one that T.S. Eliot writes about, somewhere in his poetry. It is the one describing burning. Here the Buddha is speaking to a thousand monks.

This is what I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Gaya, at Gaya's Head, together with a thousand monks. And there the Blessed One gave this discourse:

"All is burning. And what is this all that is burning? It is the eye that is burning, forms are burning, eye consciousness is burning, eye contact is burning, and whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion. Burning with birth, aging, sickness, and death. Burning with sorrow, pain, desolation, and despair.

"And so it is with all the senses: with hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. And the mind itself is also burning, burning with the fires of craving, the fires of aversion, the fires of delusion, burning with birth, aging, sickness, and death, burning with sorrow, pain, desolation, and despair.

"Now when a meditator, properly instructed, grasps this by direct experience, they become disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with eye consciousness, disenchanted with eye

contact, and disenchanted with whatever feeling is conditioned by that eye contact, whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. And so it is with all the senses and the very mind itself. Once disenchanted with the sensual world as a source of happiness, the meditator loses interest. And through this dispassion, they become liberated. And with that liberation there comes this knowledge: there will be no more birth, the spiritual life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been done, there will be no more returning into states of becoming."

That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's teachings. And while this discourse was being delivered, the hearts of those thousand monks were liberated from the taints through the way of non-clinging.

So, just to bring this to an end, I want to return to his victory verse, and then I shall chant it in Pali. We'll sit for a while in silence, and then we'll do the metta.

Sometimes I think we don't read the scriptures enough.

So now he's fully enlightened, he's broken through, he's awakened. And this is the victory verse that he told Ananda sprung spontaneously to him upon that awakening:

Seeking but not finding the house-builder, I have travelled from birth to birth countless times. Painful indeed is birth over and over again. But now, O house-builder, you have been seen. You shall not build another house again. Your rafters have been broken, your ridgepole demolished. My citta has attained the unconditioned and gone beyond any kind of craving.

Aneka jāti saṃsāraṃ sandhāvissaṃ anibbisaṃ, gahakārakaṃ gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ. Gahakāraka diṭṭhosi, puna gehaṃ na kāhasi, sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā gahakūṭaṃ visaṅkhataṃ. Visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ taṇhānaṃ khayamajjhagā.

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