The Years of Teaching and Parinibbāna

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 55:45

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

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

For one or two who have just joined us, I've been over these past few weeks going through the Buddha's life and using it as a basis to consider his teachings. We finally come now to the years of teaching and his final hours, his final days. If we recall to mind on that wonderful night he became enlightened with the dawn, that's how they put it, in the full moon of May. He became fully awakened and understood exactly why he had been in a state of dissatisfaction or suffering.

He spent the next night considering the Dharma and going through especially the Wheel of Dependent Origination, which was his psychological paradigm as to why we get ourselves into such a dreadful state. After that, his first thought was who can I teach? Who can I pass this on to? Then came the doubt that there wasn't anybody he could think of that really would be open to this.

If you consider that at that time, all the philosophies, all the understandings were about the self. They were about, did the self annihilate? There were some people who just presumed that when you died you annihilated, which would be equal to our materialists. There were those who believed in some sort of future life, rebirth, but eventually you would annihilate. There were those who thought that actually all you did was just keep being reborn and there wasn't much you could do about it, it was just the way it was. Some were so convinced of that that one teacher said, if you went down to one side of the Ganges and did all sorts of compassionate and wonderful deeds and came up the other side burning, murdering and thieving, it wouldn't make a jot of difference. Your karmic line is already set, it was fated and there's nothing you can do.

All the philosophies around that time were to do with the self and what happens to the self. When he suddenly realized that this self that they were talking about was a phantasm, didn't actually exist, was just a concept in the mind, then as he's thinking who can I get this message across to, he gets this block. This is my own interpretation, you understand. It says in the scriptures that the great Brahmā Sahampati came and said, "No, Lord, do teach, for some people have only a little dust in their eyes."

We can either, these days we'd be rather cynical of Brahmā Sahampati turning up. It's more in the sense that he had a second thought about it. But you must remember that there's always a little bit of propaganda in the Buddhist texts. Brahmā, of course, is the highest of all gods in the Hindu pantheon. That

he should be coming down and asking the Buddha to teach was simply saying that the Buddha had gone beyond the teachings of his day.

Leaving that aside, he then decides to teach. There are some writers you'll come across who said that he hesitated to teach, that he could have just sat there and simply done nothing, just sat in bliss until the body gave up. But this goes completely contrary to his own teachings. The Eightfold Path that we call the Eightfold Path is one path. We can think of it as a highway with eight lanes in it, but I think we're closer to the mark if we think of a tightrope made of eight strands, because it's so easy to fall off. That's how we find it's difficult to walk the path.

These eight strands move together. It's not possible in the Buddha's teaching to separate out right understanding from its expression in action, in what we do. Wisdom will naturally express itself into compassion. That's the whole point, that there's a flow downward and outward, inward, into the very heart of our existence, of our being, for want of a better word. Once we've understood such things, then of course there's that change of attitude in the heart. That's why in the Eightfold Path we go from right understanding to right attitude.

Right understanding is always about these three characteristics. It's always about understanding the role of desire. It's always about undercutting the idea of self. When that translates into the heart, then it manifests as an outward going. When he talks about himself as a teacher, the word he uses is *anukampan*. He says, "I as a teacher have done everything that a teacher could do for you out of compassion." But the word isn't the usual word *karuṇā*, which we've come across, but *anukampan*, which means moving towards the other, an empathy, a sympathy. That's what drives him to teach.

When the self goes, or as the self goes, we begin to understand this idea of interdependency, interconnections, all that. When that goes into the heart, that expresses itself in love, compassion, sympathetic joy. If it doesn't do that, then it can remain as an idea, as a notion, but it's not going to affect our behavior until it moves into the heart.

In the Zen tradition they will tell you that compassion arises naturally with wisdom and I think we can take that as fairly true, but even so we should budget along a bit because sometimes we can stay up in the head a bit too long. When it moves into the heart and we are in communication with people, then that naturally expresses itself by the way we speak kindly, appropriately, and how we behave in a gentle manner, not getting angry and killing people, in our livelihood. You can see there's an outward flow.

There's the Buddha, he's had this amazing insight, he's suddenly understood something to which there is no further profundity. He's thinking about it, he's worked it through, and as it drops into the heart, there's that movement outward of who can I bring to this liberation? The doubt isn't whether he should do it or not. The doubt is whether people are ready for it. Once he's overcome that, he moves forward.

The first two that come to mind are his old teachers, because they trained him and he knew their religious

and spiritual depth. But they died. When I was in Burma last, there was a statue which I'd never seen before, the actual *mudrā,* the shape of it. The Buddha was sitting there and his hand was pointing towards the heart centre. I'd never seen it before and asked what it was. I was rather touched when they said that it was the sadness he felt when he realised his two teachers were dead and he wasn't able to pass on the message of his teachings. I thought it was rather touching.

The next people he thought about, of course, were his own five companions. He walks about 100 and odd miles from where he was up to Isipatana Park, perhaps a little more, and finds them there, and that's where he begins his teaching.

Even we ourselves, you see, we have to accept that once you're on the path, whether you like it or not, you become a teacher. It might not be an official post, and you might not get paid for it, but you're immediately there as an exemplar. I think I've mentioned before that if you tell somebody that you meditate, and that it's done you a powerful lot of good, and then they find you completely drunk in the gutter, then they have second thoughts about whether they want to do any of this meditation.

As soon as we take on a path, whether we like it or not, we have the responsibility of being as best we can an exemplar. By that way, we are a teacher. That question that you'll see discussed in various books, as far as I'm concerned there is no doubt about the Buddha's desire to pass on the message. The compassion must come forward.

When we look at the other tradition, that is the Pacceka Buddha, the Buddha who's a private Buddha, in other words somebody who simply becomes enlightened, it's not that they don't want to teach, the idea is that they can't, they don't have that ability, something that has to be learned. This comes out in the Buddha himself.

He's now got up from his seat and he's off searching for disciples. He comes across a *samana*, another ascetic. The ascetic looks at him and says, "You look very bright, you look very clear. Who's your teacher?" The Buddha announces, "I have no teacher, I'm the fully enlightened being, I know the cosmos in and out." The ascetic simply says, "Oh no," shakes his head and moves on.

He obviously learnt very quickly that's not quite the way that you teach somebody.

You'll see that in the scriptures. If you read the early parts of the scriptures, like the Sutta Nipāta, it's not so formalized, four of these, ten of those, twelve of them. It's very personal. You can see that they are memories of actual conversations that he's had with people. It's only as he's teaching and as people come to him and want to remember what he's teaching that these mnemonics are worked out. It's easy to remember if there are five of these and four of those and 37 factors of enlightenment. By the end of his life it was beginning to turn into almost an academic exercise which later on turned into the Abhidhamma.

The teaching was just part and parcel of his nature. When you go through his life there's all sorts of incidents that happen. I only covered a few but just the sense of his teaching. There was one very dull

monk who was so dull that it's said that as he remembered one phrase it pushed the other phrase out. He never got beyond this one phrase. His brother said to him that he really wasn't fit to be in the order because part of it was trying to remember the Buddha's teaching. If he couldn't remember the Buddha's teaching, what the heck would he do?

When the Buddha heard about this, he went to visit and immediately gave him an exercise of just taking a piece of clean cloth, wiping his face, the sweat on his face, rubbing the cloth, and simply saying, "*Anicca*, impermanence, impermanence." Lo and behold, in no shorter time, as the scriptures say, he became fully liberated.

The gloss on that, "in no length of time," in the commentaries, is around about 25 to 30 years. It's not as though he just wiped his face a few times and bingo. I don't know whether you ever want to try that. It didn't work for me.

It's a case of understanding that the teacher has a marvelous ability to actually get into the person and just catch what they want.

Another one is, of course, the very famous story of Aṅgulimāla. Aṅgulimāla is a murderer. He's actually, according to the story, fulfilling a demand made of him by his teacher who was jealous of him, fearful of him taking over his position. He demanded of him as his guru reward, in fact you give a present to your guru in those days, that he collect a thousand little fingers.

Off he goes and does that. At some point the Buddha either meets him by chance or he's heard about him or through his powers understands that Aṅgulimāla is not a murderer in his heart, he's just been driven to this. I wouldn't be surprised if he knew of him because he was supposed to be a Brahmin, he was of a Brahmin caste.

The tale goes when Aṅgulimāla spies him and starts to hunt him down, the Buddha produces this magical trick of walking and yet always staying ahead of Aṅgulimāla who's racing and racing trying to catch up. When Aṅgulimāla shouts out, "Stop, monk!" or "Stop, ascetic!" the Buddha turns around and says, "Well, I have stopped. It's you that haven't stopped."

Somehow that just cuts into Aṅgulimāla and makes him consider what he's actually doing. Presumably in the following conversations with the Buddha, he recognizes that he's fallen foul of his own heart by following a tradition of giving a present to the guru even though that present was unwholesome. He then takes on the Buddha's teaching, becomes a member of the order which saves him from execution by the king, by the way, who comes looking for him, and in no length of time becomes fully liberated.

The other one which I'm sure you all know is Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth. Bāhiya is a very old man and he only wears a bark-cloth. He's a long time ascetic and he's not getting anywhere. He's stuck and he hears about this great *samana*, the great ascetic, and off he goes to find the Buddha.

When he finds the Buddha, he says, "Can you give me some teaching?" He wants to sit down and talk about all his issues, and the Buddha says, "Well, this isn't the time, because I'm off on alms round." Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth is a very elderly person so he says, "Listen, I could die any minute. It's very important for me to hear any teachings you've got." The Buddha simply says to him, "In the seeing there's only the seeing, in the hearing there's only the hearing, in the cognizing there's only the cognizing." Right there and then Bāhiya breaks through the delusion and becomes fully enlightened.

As the story goes, not long after leaving the Buddha, walking along the street, an angry cow butted him to death. So he was extremely lucky that the Buddha actually answered his question there and then. I love these stories.

There's also another little story from Nanda, who was his half-brother. He joins the order and he's struggling and struggling to practice and falling into the error of over-effort. Realizing that he's not getting anywhere, he immediately thinks, which is understandable, that he's wasting his time, and he may as well leave the holy life, go back, live the good lay life, bring up some children, and hope for a better rebirth.

When the Buddha hears this, and actually what's drawing him away is lust, he takes him up into the highest heaven to see these most beautiful nymphs and sets this as a goal that he could actually attain, rather than go off and just be with human women. He then carries on with his practice, and lucky for him, he also, in no length of time, becomes fully liberated.

There are all these lovely little stories about how he was able just to really see what was necessary in a person as they approach him, see right into their heart and give them just the technique that they needed to make a break.

You'll see that although in the scriptures you do get this idea that there's a basic technique around the breath and so on, you can see from these stories that actually anything that works will do, anything that brings us to some sort of realization of these three characteristics, the transience, how we create suffering for ourselves and the not-self will do.

Just one last one to finish this off, his sense of humour comes through. Humour doesn't carry very well and you've got to presume that this must have been a rather humorous scene. In those days, if you remember, there was this great idea of ascetic practice. Somebody leaves the sensual world recognizing that the sensual world is not going to be a place where they're going to be happy. They go off and they practice *jhāna*, following the same path as the Buddha. The Buddha isn't doing anything up until he's sitting under that tree that lots of people weren't doing at that time.

They get into the *jhāna* and the happy states, and then they realize, well, that doesn't do it. The next thing is to blame the body.

The body's at fault, so then we get into this sort of ascetic practice. And there were some very strange ideas. So if you think there's some wacko ideas going around these days, it must have been living at the

time of the Buddha.

So there are these two ascetics who are called the dog ascetic and the cow ascetic. And the understanding is that they're going to preempt any future rebirth as a cow or as a dog by living as a cow or as a dog right here in this very life. So the dog ascetic approaches the Buddha with his friend the cow ascetic and says, "Lord, my friend here is practicing the cow ascetic practice. What will be his future? What will be his born? What happens to him when he dies?"

And the Buddha says, "Don't ask me." And his second time, the dog ascetic said, "Lord, please." "Please don't ask me." And for the third time they insisted that the Lord give them some answer. So the Blessed One said, "This cow ascetic – he is developing cow perceptions. He is developing cow feelings. He is developing cow consciousness. Therefore upon death he will be reborn as a cow." And the cow ascetic wept heavily and finally came to his senses. And then having come to his senses, he approaches the Lord and says, "Blessed one, my friend is practicing the dog ascetic practice." And I'll leave you to finish the story.

So you get these lovely little instances in the scripture where obviously the Buddha is having a bit of a pulling somebody's leg. There was – I heard somebody say, I can't remember where – that the Buddha was only, there's only one or two incidences in the scriptures where he's actually engaged in a compassionate act. And in a sense that undermines the whole point of teaching. The teacher is, or a teacher is compassionate. When somebody is actually teaching anybody, that is a compassionate act. Whether it's a parent teaching a child or a teacher in a school or a Dharma teacher, anybody. Once you teach, you're offering something. What you're offering is your own wisdom and skills and understandings.

So when we talk about compassionate acts, it needn't be something quite so, shall we say, so obvious as, say, serving in a leper colony or something. Compassionate acts can be very small and very simple and they might not need at all any sense of bravery or anything of that nature.

So when it comes to what you might look at, what you might see as actual acts of compassion, as these days people might see it, there are just one or two. So remember the lovely story of Kisagotami. So she had lost her child and the dead child was looking around for somebody to bring it back to life or to do something for the dead child. And bringing it to the Buddha, he simply set her this task of finding a mustard seed, of which of course there are over plenty in India, from a house, but with the proviso that nobody had died in that house.

So Kisagotami is in a state of desperate bereavement, leaves the child with the Buddha and goes off searching for the seed. And going from house to house, the message is the same. "Sure, I've got plenty of mustard seeds, but my Lord, this house has known death. It's known death from who knows when, right up to this present day – so-and-so died, grandfather died, this child died," and so on. And very slowly it dawns on her that death is just part of life and this brings her to her senses. And coming back to the Buddha she takes refuge in him and again later on joins the order and in no length of time becomes fully

liberated.

There's also a lovely scene where there's a monk who's sick and the Buddha hears about this and goes to visit him. And the poor man's got dysentery and he's in a dreadful state. It's all over him. And he says, "Well, why aren't the monks helping you?" And the monk replies, "Well, I don't do anything for the monks, so they're not going to do anything for me."

So the Buddha goes to the monks and says, "Look, this man is sick, he's dying, why aren't you doing anything for him?" And they say, "Well, he doesn't do anything for us, so we won't do anything for him." So seeing the callousness of the monks, the Buddha with Ananda go and tend to this fellow. And then he gave the talk to the monks saying, "You know, you have no mother and no father, and if you don't look after each other, who will?" And there he is, he's being a nurse to this monk. It's one of these little incidences which as it were brings out his humanity.

Even there on his deathbed, I mean, he's actually – he himself, of course, dies of dysentery. And he's on his deathbed and presumably getting weaker and weaker, when somebody turns up, a *subhadda*, and asks for ordination, a direct ordination from the Buddha. And he keeps asking, knowing that the Buddha's dying, and Ananda keeps saying, "Go away, this isn't the time, the Buddha's dying, come back afterwards and I'll ordain you." But the Buddha, on hearing this, insists that he be ordained right there and then.

So one of the, I suppose, blessings, you might say, of the Theravada scriptures is that you really do get a feel of just an ordinary human being walking around the place and being in contact. There's a little tale in there where somebody walks into a room with, and he's there amongst these monks. And they have to ask him, "Which one is the blessed one?" So they get that sense of ordinariness, and just a real sense of humanity about him. Something which gets lost when you move into the Mahayana scriptures, where, of course, he only appears in his *sambhogakāya*, the body of bliss, teaching to hundreds of thousands of bodhisattvas. So this brings us back to his simple, simple humanity.

Apart from that, there's a whole business where he's actually engaged in society, in the politics of the time. One of the disputes that he helped to disarm was around the water rights between his own people, the Sakyas, and the Koliyas. And he went up there to help them overcome this argument. They were going to enter into some sort of war or something. And he simply asked them what was more precious to them, the water in the river or the blood in their veins.

There's a lovely little tale that goes with it where he asks the people who are the leaders, the warrior caste, what is the fight about? And they're not very clear. And then as he comes down to stratifying society, they don't quite know why they're fighting. They're just very angry. And they hate the Koliyas. And the Koliyas hate the others. And it's only when it gets down to the farmers that the farmers actually make it clear. "Oh, we're fighting over water rights." And I think that has a certain resonance for these days, exactly why we're fighting. There's only a few people actually know why we go to war.

There's another incident where, right towards the end of his life, where so much is happening. The king Ajatasattu wants to attack the Vajjian confederacy and sends an ambassador along to ask the Buddha whether in fact this was the right time to do it. It's a rather strange thing to do. And the Buddha actually gives him some directions as to what maintains a good society. And I thought I might just read out his things, which some of them, I think, make sense to us.

So he turns to Ananda and he says, "Ananda, have you heard whether the Vajjians hold frequent and well-attended meetings?" "They do, Lord." "As long as they do so, Ananda, they can expect to prosper and not decline. Have you heard whether they assemble in concord, rise in concord, and do their duty as Vajjians in concord? Whether they avoid enacting the unenacted or abolishing existing enactments and proceed in accordance with the ancient Vajjian laws as enacted? Whether they honour, respect, revere and venerate the Vajjian elders and think they should be heeded? Whether they honour and respect and venerate the Vajjian shrines both in the towns and country without allowing the lawful oblations hitherto given and made to lapse? Where the lawful protection, defense, and guarding is provided among the Vajjians for the religious?" Here you see Arahats.

So he's got these various ways in which he says that a community will remain strong. And when the ambassador hears this, he goes back and tells Ajatasattu that it's not quite the right time to attack them. So in that way he was able to undermine that. Later on of course through devious means Ajatasattu did actually attack and take over the Vajjian territory.

There's also this quite astonishing story when you think about it. Virudhaka became the next king after Pasenadi of Kosala, and he was the overlord of the Sakyans. And when Virudhaka wanted to marry into the Sakyan clan, the Sakyans thought that his caste was too low for them so they tricked him into marrying a lower caste. When Virudhaka found out about this of course he was utterly mortified and determined to attack the Sakyans and destroy them.

So the Buddha having heard this and knowing that he was out on his elephant went out and stood before him and was able to turn him back. And he did that a second time and a third time. And the fourth time – and this is something to record – when he was told the fourth time he'd gone out, the Buddha said he could do nothing. And it seems those people were attacked and the city was destroyed and they moved Kapilavatthu.

Now this has, I think, a teaching for us these days because of our understanding of being engaged in society and how much you can do, and being aware of the circle of power we have and the circle of influence. And that once we touch the edge of those circles, there's nothing more you can do. So any frustration, any disappointment, any despair about the situation, which you can't do anything about, is actually unnecessary and is coming from some other centre, which is not being, shall we say, humble about oneself. Like, what can I do? So anything else after that, one has to simply accept. It's part of what you might call our social *kamma*, for want of a better phrase. So the Buddha's, he's done his best. He's

been out there three times. And when the fourth time comes, he says he can't do anything. And that's the end of it.

Now, towards the end of his life, there's all sorts of things happen. Ajatasattu, this king, kills his father, starves his father to death so that he can take over the kingdom. And he's supporting Devadatta, whom I'm sure some of you know. Devadatta was the monk who decided that he should lead the order. And there's a lovely passage here where he approaches the Buddha: "Lord, the Blessed One is now old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life and come to the last stage. Let the Blessed One now rest, let him dwell in bliss in the present life. I will govern the *Saṅgha* of *bhikkhus*."

And the Buddha's reply: "Enough, Devadatta, do not aspire to govern the *Saṅgha* of *bhikkhus*." And so he rebukes him. Devadatta then of course, as I'm sure you know, tries to kill him. He sets the elephant, Nalagiri, to rage upon him. And there's a lovely story where the Buddha, as the elephant's coming towards him, just actually offers his loving kindness towards the elephant, and the elephant actually stops before him, sucks dust from his feet, and blows it over his body, his own body, not over the Buddha's.

And the other story is of course he rolled a boulder down a hill which caught the Buddha's big toe and made it bleed. So Devadatta has really bad press. But actually if you think about what he was trying to do, then in a sense one can understand what was happening. The Buddha, remember, his early life as an ascetic had been quite basic, living under tree roots, living off rag robes, only taking what was in the bowl to eat. Very, very basic life of a beggar.

And as the order grew, and there were invitations to come into the families, to food, to be served food by his supporters, he was given monasteries with rooms and carpets and things like that. And you can understand that Devadatta, and it would seem quite a few monks at the time, just thought the whole thing was getting very soft. And so he comes with these 60 men, you see, that they live only in the forest and not live in villages. That they eat only from arms round and not go to houses. That they only wear robes that are made from the rags from dead bodies. That's what they used to get them from. That they lived at the root of a tree and that they were vegetarian and not meat-eaters.

And what this brings us to is, you know, the Buddha's feel for not being fundamentalist, not being rigid, recognizing that within any society there has to be some sort of latitude, there has to be some sort of give and take.

When he starts the order, he doesn't seem to come from any ideal. He's not sat down and thought, "Now, you know, what sort of order do I want to create?" There were the basic rules of those times of how you should live if you had left the lay life and undertaken what became of the *brahmacharya*, the holy life. So he was simply following the customs of the day. As people said to him, "Well, you know, we'd like to join you, we'd like you to be our teacher, our guru," as they would say. He said, "Well, do likewise."

So for 20 years, such were the quality of people who joined him that there wasn't any need to create a

rule. And then as people with less integrity, you might say, joined, then things began to get done which were against the customs of the day and he would make a rule about it. So the institution of the *Saṅgha* as it grew up wasn't something which came from an ideal, it just gathered this law as people did wrong, as people made mistakes and then he would make a rule. So eventually there came this body of law by the end of his life which constitutes the institution. And if you think about an institution, an institution has an aim and it has a body of law, the body of rules and regulations which hopefully make that aim possible.

So when he's instituting or when he's developing the *Saṅgha*, the only duties that he says that order members have is to study the Dharma and to practice *vipassanā*. That's the actual duties that a monk or nun have. There's actually no duty there to teach. And there came this complaint where the lay people had gathered on a full moon day where the Buddhist monks and nuns were gathered in a park. And that was the custom of the day, the full moon, very bright, very easy to see. And they would spend the moonlit hours discussing Dharma. That was what seems to have been the great custom of the day.

So they complained to the Buddha that when they approached his monks and nuns, they just sat there like dumb pigs. So then there came this rule that if you were asked a question of Dharma, you had to answer it. But it's interesting to know that that's, shall we say, something that the monastic does because of a response. So it's not within the tradition to go out and proselytize. One has to wait. One has to wait to be asked.

I wanted to, we have the idea of the Buddha being a very warm, compassionate, huggy-wuggy, touchy-feely sort of person. But I thought I'd read out to you what happened when somebody actually goes against the rule. Unless you've read the Vinaya, the books on the Vinaya, you probably won't have come across this. Now, the only one in this book, unfortunately, is to do with the first *Parājika*.

Now, a *Parājika*, there are four *Parājikas*, whereby if a monk or nun, as you know, the nun order died out about a thousand years ago, but it has been re-established, and there are, to date, I heard anyway, about 200 fully ordained nuns in Sri Lanka now.

Now Suddina had left his wife because of his urge to seek liberation. But when he went back home, they cajoled and insisted that he cohabit with his wife to produce a child so that the family would continue. And falling for the argument, Suddina does cohabit with his wife and she gives birth to a son. However, when the monks heard about this, they of course rushed to the Buddha and said, do you know what he did?

And so the Buddha brings him to him and I'll just give you a bit of the language so you can get a feel for him as, shall we say, well, the leader, you know, the tough leader. "Misguided man, it is unfitting, unseemly, improper and unworthy of a monk. It is unrighteous and must not be done. How can you not live out the holy life in complete perfection and purity after going forth into homelessness in the Dharma and discipline as well as proclaimed as this? Misguided man, have I not taught the Dharma in various ways for the sake of dispassion, not for the sake of passion? Have I not taught the *dhamma* for the sake of

unfettering, not for the sake of fettering? Have I not taught the *dhamma* for the sake of relinquishing, not for the sake of clinging? The *dhamma* thus taught by me for dispassion, unfettering and relinquishment, you would conceive to be for passion, fettering and clinging. Has the *dhamma* not been taught by me in various ways for dispassion, for disintoxication, for curing thirst, for abolishing attachment? For severing the round of being, for exhausting craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for *Nibbāna*. Have I not described in many ways the abandoning of sensual desires, the full understanding of perceptions of sensual desires, the curing of thirst for sensual desires, the eradication of thoughts of sensual desires, the allaying of the fever of sensual desires?"

"Misguided man, it would be better for you as one gone forth that your member should have entered the mouth of a hideous venomous viper or a cobra than it should have entered a woman. It were better for you that your member should enter into a pit of coals burning, blazing and glowing that it should have entered a woman. Why is that? For the former reason, you would risk death and deadly suffering, but you would not, on the dissolution of the body after death, reappear in a state of privation, in an unhappy destination in perdition, even in hell. But for the latter reason, you would do so. Therefore, misguided man, by this act, you would pursue the Dharma's opposite. You would pursue the low, vulgar ideal that is impure and ends in ablution."

And he carries on like that, so you can see he holds no punches, doesn't mince his words. He's very clear about if you undertake the rule then that's what you do, you don't fall for arguments of this and arguments of that.

So, we also have to balance our idea of the Buddha as somebody who's very clear, very precise about the way he wants people to behave. Now, this *sila*, this conduct, which we've just chanted before, so the five basic ones, of course, are to do with our moral behavior. And what we have to really grasp is that our unethical behavior is a measure of our delusion. Delusion expresses itself in the way we speak, act and what we do. And therefore, whenever we do something wrong, it mirrors back to us the level of our delusion. And that's another reason why if you put your accent on making sure that what we do and what we think and what we say is wholesome and skillful, it comes back on the path and comes back to our understanding and our compassion.

So these three things of right understanding, right attitude and right action, speech, body and thoughts, are a wheel which turn around each other. It doesn't matter where you start on those three, it's going to affect the other two.

So I think I've just got time for the last little bit here. I just want to, there's a lovely sweet little thing here which gives us a feel for those last days. So as he's approaching old age, you see, Ananda says to him, "It is wonderful, Lord, it is marvellous. Now the colour of the blessed one's skin is no more clear and bright. All his limbs are flaccid and wrinkled, his body is bent forward and there seems a change in the sense faculties of his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and bodily sensations."

And the Buddha replies, "Well so it is, Ananda, so it is. Youth has to age, health has to sicken and life has to die. Now the colour of my skin is no more clear and bright, all my limbs are flaccid and wrinkled, my body is bent forward and there seems a change in the sense faculties of my eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and bodily sensation." So you get these little hints throughout the scriptures that he's also very much aware of his own dying.

And then there's a lovely little bit here which I would like to read out to you. So now, if you can gather, this Ananda has been accompanying the Buddha for 20 years, tending to all his needs, protecting him from people, taking over. Like, for instance, the Buddha had a bad back. So one talk he says to him, "Listen, my back's really bad, can you take over my talk?" And since my back is bad I have a direct feel for that with the Buddha's life. I think that's probably where the similarity ends, but there we are.

And he says, "Poor Venerable Ananda, seeing the Buddha now coming to the end of his days, then the Venerable Ananda went inside a dwelling and he stood leaning against the door bar and wept. 'I am still only a learner whose task is not yet completed. My teacher is about to attain final *Nibbāna*. My teacher has compassion on me.'"

Then the Blessed One asked the *bhikkhus*, "Monks, where is Ananda?" "Lord, he has just gone inside the dwelling and he is standing, leaning against the door bar weeping. 'I am still only a learner whose task is yet to be completed. My teacher is about to attain final *Nibbāna*. My teacher has compassion on me.'"

And the Blessed One told the *bhikkhus*, "Come, *bhikkhus*, go to Ananda and say to him in my name, the teacher calls you, friend Ananda." "Even so, Lord," the *bhikkhus* replied, and he went to the Venerable Ananda and said to him, "The teacher calls you, friend Ananda." "Even so," the Venerable Ananda replied, and he went to the Blessed One. Paying homage to him, he stood at one side, and the Blessed One said to him, "Enough, Ananda, do not sorrow, do not lament. Have I not already repeatedly told you that there is separation and parting and division from all that is dear and beloved? How could it be that what is born, come into being, formed and bound to fall, should not fall? That is not possible, Ananda. You have long and constantly attended on the perfect one, on the *Tathāgata*, with bodily acts of loving kindness, helpfully, gladly, sincerely and without reserve. And so too with verbal acts and mental acts. You have made merit. Indeed, keep on endeavouring and you will soon be free from the tense."

So now we actually come towards his death. And as he's dying, he asks, are there any more questions? So he's got all these monks who have gathered around him. And no more questions are coming. And then, very sensitively, he says, "Listen, if you have a question, but you feel a bit ashamed about asking it, or you don't have the courage, ask somebody else to ask it for you."

And then there's more silence, and then at that point he decides to die, not before he's spoken his last words. So before he goes he says, "Whatever is formed and compounded will dissolve. Work diligently for your own liberation."

And whenever I read that I always ask myself, well I wonder what my last words will be. "Why me?" Something like that. And I always remember in Unforgiven by Clint Eastwood, and he shoots all these enemies and I can't remember the name of the actor but his last words are, "This shouldn't have happened." I thought it was marvellous. And then there's a story of dear Oscar Wilde who as you know became derelict at the end of his life and was dying in a room in Paris as a destitute, and he hated the wallpaper. And it seems as though he turned to the wallpaper and his last words were, "One of us will have to go."

So there's all these lovely last words, you know. So there's the Buddha with just very simply saying, "Listen, everything that is formed or compounded will dissolve. Work diligently for your own liberation."

And finally, going back to the earlier talk I gave, after his death there's a certain Brahmin called Moggallana who asks Ananda, "Is there any single monk who possesses in all ways and in every way those qualities that Master Gautama possessed?" And Ananda refuses to reply, he doesn't reply to it. And right at the end of this particular discourse, this is what Ananda said: "The Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the producer of the unproduced path, the declarer of the undeclared path, the path-knower, the path-seer, skilled in the path. When disciples dwelling in conformity with the path become possessed of it, they do so after him."

And that's really the position of the Buddha. So I entitled these talks, The Buddha as Archetype and Exemplar. It can be heartwarming to begin to read the scriptures and to flesh out the Dharma, rather than four of these and four of those and all that, and to recognize that there was an actual human being who lived through this and came to this wonderful conclusion for it. And with that, there arises that lovely feeling of gratitude. And here you see this wonderful centre. It simply wouldn't have happened if 2,500 years ago this particular person had not made this breakthrough.

And finally, when Ananda says to him, "Who are you going to leave to govern the order when you go?" So his reply is, and I may as well read the actual text, he says, "Each of you should make himself an island, himself and no other his refuge. Each of you should take the Dharma as an island, the Dharma and no other refuge."

And how do we do that? "Here, you abide contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully mindful and aware, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, contemplating consciousness as consciousness, contemplating mental objects as mental objects, ardent, fully aware, mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. Either now or when I am gone, it is those, whoever they may be, who make themselves their island themselves, unto themselves, and no other island, who make the Dharma their island, and the Dharma are no other refuge to themselves, who will be foremost amongst my disciples, of those, that is, who want to train."

So his final instructions to us was that eventually we have to find that strength within ourselves. We have to, what we're doing here is to find a way, or taking his teachings as a refuge, taking that Dharma as a

refuge, to find for ourselves our own liberation. And that old teaching that the Buddhas only point the way and that's all they can do, it's left to us to do the work.

So I think that brings me to the end of my sojourning. There's lots of stuff I haven't touched upon around the life of the Buddha. I haven't actually, unfortunately it was there written on my script but I skipped over it, was the whole incident around women and joining the order. But I'm sure you've heard all those sorts of things before. So the purpose really is to be inspired by his life and his works and to make them our own.

So I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance to you. May you be fully liberated even before you leave this centre.

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