Right Livelihood

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:00:00

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

I thought to say something about right livelihood this evening, and then if there's time to answer one or two of these questions.

When the Buddha formulated his teaching, it didn't come immediately. It was something that grew as he taught. He ended up with the path, the Eightfold Path, and that's part of the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth simply states that there is *dukkha*. And dukkha translates as a hard place. We're in a hard place, that's what it means. And he defined that as being because it was in a constant state of change, then there was this ordinary suffering that we get through our unfulfilled desires and so on, and then there's that more subtle suffering of knowing that the self is not real. There's an underlying feeling, I think, about life because of death, because it's not steady, because it's always there in the background. The sense of self doesn't have a ground and that causes a deep anxiety within us. Indeed, you can say that all anxiety and all fear is the fear of death, fear of disappearance.

Then he goes on to be a bit more specific and he says that the cause of suffering is this desire. And he simply points to that as a kernel psychological position that we have, seeking happiness in things that are simply not going to deliver, that's all. You wouldn't invest in a stock anymore which was told to you by everybody that it would fail. So life will fail us. We're going to die. And yet there we are, investing everything in it.

That desire is a psychological point and from that he then goes on to give us the wheel of dependent origination which is a template of all sentient beings, that's what he says, not just human beings, which is definitely common to all human beings as to how we cause suffering for ourselves. That's the basic psychology that he's into. It's not developmental psychology. I mean, there is a little bit about the psychology of perception, but he's very clear, one-pointed, always centering on this problem of dukkha. And therefore, the whole psychology is centered on that.

In that Second Noble Truth, he pinpoints where the problem lies, psychologically. And then the third one, of course, he states quite categorically that there is an end to dukkha. He doesn't use the word *nibbāna* there. Nibbāna is in other texts. But in terms of the formulation of the Four Noble Truths, the Third Noble Truth is there is an end to dukkha, *dukkha-nirodha*. And then finally, of course, he states the path leading

out of it.

The formulation of the Four Noble Truths simply follows the way that doctors wrote their, or at least worked with an illness. First it was diagnosed, like dukkha, and the cause of the illness was discovered. And then finally the prognosis, which in this case is perfect health and happiness. Not health, perfect happiness. And the fourth was the actual medicine to be used. So the medicine that we're using is the Eightfold Path.

We begin, through this practice of meditation, with trying to correct this *sammā-diṭṭhi*, this right understanding, to see the world in a correct way. And when we do that, it has a systemic change, which doesn't mean to say that we can't work on these other parts of the path. So the second part, of course, is getting the attitude right, getting the right attitude to things.

Today, for instance, we've been trying to develop a much clearer attitude around food. Why are we eating? You sit there and say, no, the pleasure is secondary. It comes up, but I'm not eating for that purpose. I'm eating specifically for nourishment of the body.

And then, having got the intelligence right and the heart right, got the mind and the heart right, there is that natural flow into action. So it's through speech, through action, right action, and then right livelihood. Interestingly enough, there's really no need logically to put right livelihood in there because it's included in right action. Livelihood is an action. But he obviously felt it to be so important as to have its own particular category.

There's an interesting passage which relates to this, where Ānanda, who was his companion for the last twenty-odd years of his life, comes to one of these conclusions, where he seems to always get it wrong, and one of these conclusions was that good companionship was half the spiritual life. And the Buddha says, "Oh no, Ānanda, it's the whole of the spiritual life." So that's how important our companions are, the people whom we mix with, because, of course, they affect us. We're in constant conversation with them. We relate to people who are close to us, work with us, etc., etc.

So then he states this right livelihood as a section on its own. So it's worth thinking about it a little bit, reflecting on it, and seeing what pointers we can get. The fact of the matter is that livelihood takes up so much of our life, generally speaking, that obviously it has to become a vehicle through which we can practice and hopefully liberate ourselves.

Just very quickly, we can dismiss all those things that are not right livelihood. Anything that brings harm to other people. Trading in arms, in living beings, intoxicating drinks, poison, slaughtering, fishing, soldiering, deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery, usury, etc. There's a whole load of things which would not be considered skillful because they are inherently doing other people harm.

Remember that all ethics, the whole of the ethical life in the Buddhist teaching simply comes down to doing harm. To do harm to somebody else in any way is considered to be unwholesome. So any job that

you can see is actually doing harm to another person, or we can extend it these days to the planet, may give you cause for concern. I hope I've not made anybody redundant.

Just on that note, if, of course, one finds oneself in a job which the person has ethical problems around, then you have to be kind to yourself. You can't just drop it there and then. But just by deciding that you don't want to do this job anymore and inclining towards another job, then you'll slowly find your way out of it. There are other conditions to be taken into consideration, generally speaking.

For instance, I know somebody who was in the beer trade, sold beer for a company. Once he became into the Dharma, then he had this problem about he shouldn't be selling beer. I never quite got a straight answer from him as to how he finally rationalized himself into keeping the job. But the fact was that he wanted to know what I felt. I said, well, if I really felt strongly about that, I would move towards another job, but I'd have to take into consideration the effects on my family. So I don't want to take a hard position on something and then find myself being redundant and putting a huge pressure.

I know somebody else who was in the police and had similar problems. He really didn't like the way the police worked. He got a lot of ethical problems about the way the police force works. So he wanted to move, and he was interested in some sort of therapy, I remember. But he took the road of trying to get some funding for it, and eventually he couldn't get it. So he simply found a corner within the police force where he felt at least he wasn't joining in those parts which he felt were unethical. He ended up in special branch. Looking after politicians. Yeah, that's an ethical problem. Don't be too cynical.

Leaving all that aside, we can then also delineate those motivations which are not as bad as selling human beings and that sort of stuff, but are unwholesome, they're unskillful. Here we come to this whole area of the celebs. What are celebrities? It's somebody who's made it either with riches, power, or fame, isn't it? They've done something that makes them well-known in their field.

Now, you can understand if that's the aim of your life, to get rich or to get power in order to realize your aims or simply to become famous, then it puts a twist on the job you're doing, doesn't it? It puts a twist on the job. I know that we have downers on people who've made a lot of money out of their business, poor old Bill Gates comes in for a hammering. But the interview that I saw, I mean, his interest wasn't so much in making money, but it began with a real interest in the whole idea of computers and what computers could do. Then, of course, it's very successful and you build an empire. And then, of course, you're into defense and you're up against Sony and people like that. And the whole thing becomes slightly twisted.

Again, whenever we look at it, it's to do with attitude. It's not about not getting money. The Buddha, again, is quite clear. It's not how much you earn that's important. It's how you earn it. The amount you get is neither here nor there. And then, of course, what you do with the amount. What do you do with the money you have? And if it's done for the benefit of others, then obviously it's a very wholesome thing.

So the Buddha is definitely into entrepreneurship, and I'm sure he'd be a supporter of some form of

capitalism if he was here. I hope nobody's going to shoot me.

The case is that this business of making money, if you look at somebody like Anāthapiṇḍika, he was one of his great supporters. Anāthapiṇḍika was a merchant, made a lot of money and bought grounds for a monastery. In fact, so the tale goes that he wanted to buy this park from Prince Jeta. And the prince didn't want to sell it at all. So he said he would only sell it if it was completely covered with gold coins. So Anāthapiṇḍika wanting to make this gift to the Buddha completely covered it with gold coins and got it from Prince Jeta. And it's known as the Jetavana Monastery. And obviously the Buddha liked being there. It was a nice place.

Anāthapiṇḍika then, it seems, loses all his money, and even in abject poverty, he never comes to the monastery without something. So at one point, he arrives just with soil in his hands that he's picked up from his own garden, good soil, and he spreads it onto the monastery grounds. Later, it seems, he does become rich again and as the story goes he dies as one who has intuitive *nibbāna*. So there's hope for us, hope for us all. I think even hope for the rich.

So it's a case of there's nothing actually wrong with being rich. That's the point from the Buddha's point of view. And of course the same can go for power. I mean people who use power just for purely selfish reasons, well we've got lots of examples of those these days. It's one of the big problems, for instance, in Africa, isn't it? Really bad governance where people just screw their own people of all sorts of things. But obviously when you get somebody who is in power and has power for the benefit of the society that they're in, then obviously it's not something to be seen as unskillful or unwholesome. Somebody has to make decisions. Even in a small workplace, somebody has to make decisions. Whoever makes decisions has the power.

So it's a case of, again, power not in itself being something unskillful or unwholesome, but basically how we use it. And just on the side of that, in our lives, especially in places at work, we all of us have a ring of power. We can all do something, affect something. And then there's another ring, which is about influence, so we can influence people to do things. And then, of course, it stops.

A lot of our problems arise because we don't recognize where the end of that ring is. So when we try to exercise more power than we have, then of course we tend to become frustrated. And if we find ourselves not using our power but being overridden by others who are less powerful than us, then we feel that we've let people down, we've not lived up to our responsibility because with power there comes that responsibility.

And it's the same with influence. Whatever influence we have, we should use for the benefit of others. But when we see that our influence is not working, then you have to be very careful that you accept that boundary. If you don't accept that boundary, then again you start feeling frustrated and all sorts of stuff. So people, especially in those areas which are caught up in work where there's a lot of emotional value put on it, like ecological issues and political issues. And if they don't accept where their boundary of power

and influence lies, then they just get burnout, and that doesn't help anybody at all.

So that's important too, isn't it? To know the extent of what we're capable of doing ourselves and of how much we are capable of getting other people to do things.

And then fame. Fame is probably the shallowest of them all, really. But as you know, famous people, either film stars or football stars and whatnot, you can use it for the benefit of others. I suppose a very good example of that is Bob Geldof, isn't it? After all, he's only a musician. And yet he's able to motivate people. And so anything that we have, even within our small area of influence, which is done for the benefit of others, is thereby wholesome.

If one becomes famous and then one gets a very big head, then it just becomes a headache in the end, doesn't it? And all these things, of course, when they're taken from you, they cause misery. They cause a lot of misery.

I always remember that case of a very young East European immigrant to Australia, who in a very short length of time built up this huge property empire. And when property dropped in, I think it was in the 80s, he committed suicide. So you can see how we can make this mistake of actually identifying with the power we have, no matter how little it is, and the riches, and the fame.

That's one of the big problems with being made redundant, isn't it? I mean, being made redundant in our society, sure, it's a catastrophe in a sense that your wage can go, your sense of work can go, all that sort of stuff. But what turns people, what makes it despairing, of course, is that relationship that the person had with the job. You lose your sense of identity because unwittingly you define yourself by the work you do, don't you? Whether you like it or not. If anybody says, "What are you? What do you do?" You don't say, "Well, I clean the toilet at home." You say, "Well, I teach." You don't say, "I cook a meal every so often." You say, "What do you do?" Even our crucial questions always point to, actually, what do you do in society?

And from what you do in society, we tend to build up our self-esteem, our self-importance. All those areas. And of course our basic wealth. So when these are taken from us in an act of redundancy, that's when you hit that despair because you have to redefine yourself. And the definition of being unemployed isn't a particularly happy one in our society.

So it's really just being aware of that, being aware of that. And if things happen to us which take away our wealth and power and good name, fame doesn't here just mean famous in the sense of pop stars, it just means your good name. So somebody can take away your good name. And to do that you have to watch that and watch your reaction to it if that happens to you and recognize that the suffering you're getting from it is the measure of your attachment to the wealth you had and the power you had and the good name you had. And in that way, you don't justify it. This is the problem with these negative emotions.

We actually justify them. We say we ought to be angry. We ought to be depressed. We ought to be fearful. And as soon as you do that, you empower these states. So whenever something like that happens, you

have to really back off and sit in your meditation and recognize that these are actually all measures of some form of attachment, some form of wrong view. That's it.

So even if we look at various jobs, most people can find some sort of compassionate angle to what they do. It's easy in areas of service — health workers, people like that, teaching profession, doctors, and even the police, for heaven's sake. All that sort of area is, I would have thought, fairly easy to develop a right attitude, to see the job as something that is being done for others, a sense of service.

When it comes to other jobs such as entrepreneurship, business work and all that, you often get a bit of a downer on that — making money, setting up a business and all that. But actually, it's another service, isn't it? And depending on your attitude, depending on the purpose of what you're doing, then it can be tremendously worthwhile, wholesome.

Now when it comes to even those jobs that at one point we used to use the word "workers" — now it's more politically correct to talk about "operatives" — so when you're a machine operative and you're doing something very repetitive, very monotonous, then I think that you can engender that sense of it being a service. Somebody has to do the job — that's a bit of a negative way of looking at it — but in the sense that whatever the product is, so long as it's a wholesome product, a good product, then this is what the society's offered you at this particular point, and one does what one can within that situation.

Now, there are some jobs which are more directly effective upon the heart. To work with the sick, with the dying and all that, immediately, especially working with people, has an immediate effect with right attitude of extending the heart, of making it grow in those areas that we call the immeasurables, because they can be developed indefinitely. So love, compassion, sympathetic joy, care — all those lovely attitudes can be developed.

But when you get into a job where you're working with a machine, say in an office or in a factory, then of course it's difficult to have the same value of compassion towards a machine and whatnot. But there is an opportunity there to see it as a meditative exercise. And I often think about people these days, but even more so in earlier times in our society where so many people had very repetitive jobs doing the same thing. And of course that's all we're doing, isn't it? Rising, falling. You couldn't get more repetitive than watching the breath. And if you were to take that same attitude to a repetitive job, no matter what you're doing, of using it to establish this constant mindfulness, then you can see it would definitely have a strong spiritual effort to it.

I remember, even I myself, when I was a kid, used to get a job, 16, 17, get a job after school. And one job I had was in this bakery, this cake factory. And there was a line of women who followed the process from when the dough arrived or whatever, when they baked. And they swung round and went round this little machine and things were added onto this cake as it came round. And I was given the job of adding the cherry round the top. It was the last point. And as it swung round, I had to get this cherry in and stick it on.

Well, occasionally, of course, I'd miss, or it wasn't centred, and I'd go after it and try and put it... And eventually they shifted me. I was absolutely useless. And there was a... Even though I protested that I was school captain, it was dexterous of my feet, and if you'd just give me time, I could actually do this job! And I remember these lovely, kindly, simpering looks from the women — oh, he's only a boy, and all that sort of stuff. But the thing is that just being able to accept one's position there and just to use it as a concentration exercise, you can see that even something so repetitive can be turned to spiritual advantage.

So you might think then, well, what would be — how would you profile a good day at work? How would you set your mind to take as much spiritual advantage out of the work that you can get? So the first thing, of course, is to get up and do your two-hour meditation. And then, after that, to develop a bit of loving-kindness. Now, in that loving-kindness that you're developing, to actually bring the people whom you work with to mind, to bring the place to mind, to bring everybody associated to mind. And what you're doing is you're establishing a right relationship. So, right attitude is right relationship.

And if there's somebody whom you're having problems with, to at least offer an attitude of no harm and occasionally just think of their brighter side. So in a sense, you're setting yourself right with the people, with the people whom you have to work with. But there's also the job. Now, I can't think of a job which doesn't have this quality of repetition to it, no matter how — everything in life has this repetitive quality about it. And we go through periods of boredom with it and periods of not wanting to do it.

So if you get out of bed in the morning and there's just this huge desire to take a day off, then to actually stay with that, not to be hijacked by it, no matter how much you can justify it for all sorts of reasons. And to let that feeling, that down feeling, just evaporate a little bit and then to make that commitment to give your best to the job in hand. And by doing that, the heart will lift. The heart won't lift unless you make a decision. Once you make a decision to do something, the heart will follow your decision.

So it's a case of, for instance, if you want to do a job, say you've got a job at work, and you want to do the job, if there's a negativity towards it — now it's the same in meditation — if you suppress it, then it remains there as a rumbling within the psyche. But if you accept that there's a negativity towards the job, and you're just there with it and you can distance from it with this wonderful noting technique, and it's there, you know it's there, and then you override it with right attitude. And that lifts the heart.

On a slightly parallel situation is when you might feel angry towards a colleague or a workmate. So these days, especially through certain therapies, not all of them, you get these things about owning your emotion. Now that's all right, it's just that people confuse that owning with actually being. So it's all right to say, you know, there is anger arising with this person. But as soon as you say, "I am angry with this person," and then of course you have to be authentic, and you have to tell the person that you're angry with them.

Now, how do you feel when somebody comes up and says, "I'm angry with you"? What's your response to

that? While I was at Gaia House, I had a manager who was forever coming to see me and would sit there and say, "I've got problems with you." What am I supposed to say? I'd say, "Oh, what can I do about that?" And she was being authentic. She was being truthful. And of course, the presumption is that I am the cause of her dissatisfaction with me. And when you go to work and you say, "Look, I'm very angry with you," what you're saying is you are the cause of my anger. What are you going to do about it?

So it's recognizing that all those negative states are arising out of me because of some wrong attitude. Now we know from our meditation that we can't sink them, we can't push them away, try to bury them, but we can, as it were, shift them to the side. This is being skillful. So it's not me, it's not "I am angry" — there is anger, and I'll deal with you when the opportunity occurs. So it's not a case of pushing it away and suppressing it, it's simply putting it to the side, dealing with it at an appropriate time. And then, of course, one raises the attitude of kindness. Kindly words, a smile. And then, of course, you find your heart lifts towards that attitude and supports you. But again, it would be a mistake to think that, therefore, I am kind. It's just that there is now kindness and this is the relationship that I'm engendering towards this particular person.

So getting the attitude right every morning is important. So now, when it comes to the work itself, to re-establish why it is you're doing this work, and give it an attitude which is worthwhile and meaningful spiritually. You can do that. Apart from these dreadful jobs that some people do, most times you can find a worthwhile reason for doing the work.

So then one goes into the workplace and one sits at one's place or takes up the position of your workplace and just to stop for a minute and to re-establish, to constantly re-establish that sense of mindfulness, right attitude and then to give yourself to the work. Now, it's a case of being loose in that situation and of recognizing that we're in relationship with other people. This is if you're working with other people. You're in relationship with other people.

So it's much the same as our meditation. When you're sitting here in meditation, we've got this desire to investigate what's going on inside me, but if somebody comes in here now and starts talking and draws our attention, if we see that as a disturbance we're immediately in conflict, so we're immediately raising all those dreadful states that here we're supposed to be trying to let go of.

So it's the same at work, where you're doing work and a colleague comes and they're all flustered or whatever, and it's a case of you can say little things like, "just one minute, just one minute," and you know where you are, and then you respond. And remember that when somebody comes to you with fluster, with anger and whatnot, it's putting your concentration on what they're saying, not how they're saying. If you put your concentration on how they're saying, it's very difficult to stop that reaction of that immediate reaction coming from us of anger towards anger, anger towards their dumping their anxiety on us. But so long as your attention is on what they're saying, then you can guard yourself from that immediate reaction that arises.

Just on that point too, when you're with somebody who is coming at you in that way, one of the things you can do is image, if you're quick enough that is, or at least have the idea of the Buddha hand. So remember this, there's a statue called the *Abhaya* posture, the fearlessness. And this goes back to when the dastardly Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha, three times I can say. And the third time was this dreadful elephant whom he set loose. And Nalagiri, the raging bull elephant, paced down upon the Buddha. And the Buddha stood there, held up his hand in a fearless posture, and blasted the elephant with compassion. And the elephant, of course, immediately stopped and adored the Buddha.

Now, whether we believe the fullness of that story, the fact of the matter is that that tells us how to deal with situations where we find negativity coming towards us. So it's a case of protecting ourselves. So you don't have to receive somebody's anger. You don't have to accept it. You don't have to take it in. You don't have to empower it by actually reacting to it. This is what we do, isn't it? You empower anger when you react to it. So it's a case of, right? And by doing that, you protect your own heart. But from behind the hand, at least you're offering an attitude of no harm. And I personally find that very easier if I'm actually listening to what they're saying and not how they're saying.

So in my job, of course, I get occasionally very strange people. And I was running... Nobody here. Nobody here at all. And there was this occasion over a Christmas retreat that I run at Sharpham House, which is a very beautiful place, by the way. It's a lovely place to have a Christmas retreat. And because of some mistake on the calendar, one advert said the Wednesday and another one said Tuesday. So this elderly lady came who had seen it was Wednesday. And when she came and realised that she was late and it was all... She got very, very, very angry and flustered about it.

So I was working with a very good manager who'd been a manager at Gaia House. And she went out of her way to... she gave her back a day's money, tried to make her feel at home, showed her, et cetera, et cetera. And when we met, she was still very, very angry about it all. So a huge heart of compassion embraced this elderly lady and to make her feel at home. And explained everything.

And then the next day, she arrived in the evening. So the next day, I spent some time with her and showed her around the house. And she was still very angry. And once she realized that it wasn't the retreat she wanted, she wanted a hard retreat like Zen. And the one I was leading was more of a reflective, contemplative time. Just spending our time a lot in reflection. She was angry about that.

So I was still, keeping my hand up and beaming out an amazing amount of compassion and all that sort of stuff. And then, of course, we had on Christmas Day, we broke the silence and we had cake. And everybody got fairly loud and all that sort of stuff in the conversation without turning off people. And she was sitting there by the side. And earlier I'd seen her chatting quite well or openly with these other people. So I just went over to her and said, "Oh, how is everything?" And off she went, moaning and groaning. Well, I said, "Oh, for heaven's sake. You've been giving them nothing but..." You see?

So there, I'd lost my guard. I'd chewed into it. Well, of course, she didn't moan again. Not in front of me,

anyway. Unfortunately, we didn't have the opportunity, because we were leaving about the next day, to make it up, really. But I doubt if I'll be seeing her again.

So, now, what did I do? Well, frankly, I found it rather funny. But the last thing I tend to do is to get into this big self-judgment of, for God's sake, you're supposed to be a monk, you're not supposed to lose your temper. I just accept that there was a failure there. So one records it. One says, ah, right. So you've got to be on your toes, because you never know where somebody's at, is it?

So this whole business of working with people who, remember, like ourselves, are going through various ranges of emotion within one day. I mean, just think. If you were to log the amount of mental states that arise from the time you get up and the time you fall asleep, it's just madness, isn't it? You're happy, you're sad, you're depressed, you're angry, you're fed up and you're bored. It's constant. And every so often there's a little blip of peace. Oh God, relaxation. I'm happy, I'm happy. You tell the world and suddenly, oh, get angry again. So there's the skeleton of our emotional life. And when you actually catch that that's how I am and I expect other people to be compassionate and kind towards me and not to get angry and to understand me and give me a hug every so often, it asks us to behave in the same way towards other people.

So this whole business of interrelationship at work, and especially where there's difficulty with colleagues, these for us are real points of growth. Another bloody opportunity for growth, as somebody said, to look upon things positively. To see these other people who are absolutely awful as our teachers—that's the attitude we ought to have.

Then of course there's that constant effort to bring us back into the present moment. Some of you might know Thich Nhat Hanh and Plum Village, and one of the little techniques they use there is they have somebody who randomly rings a bell every so often. And when the bell goes, you have to stop. Whatever you're doing, you just stop. And then you wait for the third bell, and then you can carry on.

And they even do that with telephones. Now, you see, most of us work around telephones or have a telephone at home. So when a telephone goes, normally we launch ourselves towards it. So ask yourself, most people will hang on for three or four rings. And it's a case of acknowledging it. So if you're doing a piece of work, it's very confusing, at least for males, to have to do two or three things at once. So it's a case of seeing where you are, acknowledging the phone call, and then just that moment, just that moment of clarification, of clearing the mind, stopping.

And then so that when you answer the phone you've actually given yourself to the phone call. So half the mind isn't still doing your work, half the mind isn't still over there—you're actually dedicating this time to the phone call. And then of course when you put the phone down the same thing: that moment of reflection as to what has passed, anything that needs to be done from that phone call, whatever, and then a return back to the work you're doing. A moment of stopping, a recognition, because you've left it mindfully, it's so much easier to remember where you were at, and off you go.

Now, by doing that, you stop this rollercoaster, this rollercoaster of how emotions gather during the day like a storm. Even simple occasions where people have said something which upset you a little bit. So, you've all been through this, where there's been that little irritation, but you've palmed it aside. It's just the way they are. But it's not being dealt with, and it's a little suppression. And then just when the mind relaxes and you're having a cup of tea or something, "How dare you!" and all that, and you get into this telling them exactly what you feel. And then, of course, it builds up and by evening you're hanging them and ripping them apart and then you have to take an aspirin.

So it's a case of watching that, being very clear as to when that happens to actually stop. And that's where this meditation we're doing has an immediate role to play in our everyday life. Because that's what we're learning. We're learning that as soon as I feel any sense of irritation, immediately there's that alarm bell goes and I'm with it. I don't join it, I don't get into it. There is irritation or there's anxiety. As soon as it's there, the alarm bell should go and I should be awake to it. It only takes a second. And then to make sure that there's a right attitude and a right understanding from which you're acting from and not from this negativity. Otherwise, you just get hijacked, don't you? You just find yourself being angry, being anxious.

So if we take the workplace as a place to train spiritually, you can see it's got massive potential. And then when you finish work and you come home, that evening meditation really is very important because that's the point where you allow the day to come up. So at the end of each sitting, I ask people to reflect. So what are we reflecting on? We're reflecting upon how skillful we've been through this past three-quarters of an hour, an hour. And by bringing that reflection up and thinking about it, and then we can see where we've gone wrong, then we talk to ourselves. We talk to ourselves in a way that's going to guide us in the proper direction in our meditation. So it's exactly the same in daily life and at work.

So you come back in the evening and you look back and you think, oh, I did this and I did that and I shouldn't have done this and I shouldn't have done that. And then one reflects upon it, makes a little determination, and makes that very firm determination that when a similar occasion arises, you'll be right there on the ball.

Now, on the other side, remember, you have to balance that with congratulating ourselves. If you're always concerned about the negative, then you never get the joy of having succeeded, of having been successful in some spiritual training. So when you look back on the day and you've had a difficult situation and you know that you've handled it fairly well, then we ought to say, well, that was good. A little pat on the head, things like that. A cake. Give yourself a cake. These are the times that we ought to give ourselves little treats. You shouldn't eat cake just because you want to eat a cake. You should eat cake to celebrate.

Now, if you think about only eating a cake to celebrate, by the end of the day, you've always found something to celebrate. There's no problem with that at all. It's a case of getting our attitude right and trying to balance the books. And in that way, I think, over a period of time, a real balance comes to your

life, a sense of purpose, meaningfulness. And that's really what we want, isn't it? Meaningfulness, something that's meaningful.

And paradoxically, we get most meaning when we do things for others. Compassion, love, sympathetic joy. Now, when you do that, when you actually do things for others, there's a natural comeback in the heart of feeling joyful. So you're joyful for somebody else's joy. You're joyful that you've been able to help somebody in distress. And you're joyful with friendship. That's a natural thing. And that doesn't mean to say that you can't do it for yourself, but you do it for yourself for the right reasons. But in this case of doing it for others, when we have those beautiful states, that's what Buddhism means by *puñña*. Puñña means merit.

So it becomes vulgarized when you think of merit as some sort of piggy bank. And when you die, you go to heaven because you've been so good. That may very well be true. I mean, there is karmic consequences through time, which has its original effect in the past, the original cause in the past. But when we do something which is wholesome and good, the feeling of joy that we get, the feeling of contentment, the feeling of well-being that we have, that is our puñña. That's the merit we have.

You can see now the connection between the process of awakening and the process of good conduct. You can't have the one without the other. They come in tandem. You do get this understanding in Buddhism sometimes that there are two types. There's one type about kamma and creating good in order to get a good rebirth and off and on and then sometime in the future you might go for the enlightenment. But actually, the one is completely enveloped in the other.

It's a case of understanding that, fine, we can sit and we can devote our lives just to pure meditation. We can become a hermit and sit in a cave, and surely that's one way. I mean, that's the Buddha's way, yeah? I mean, there's a lovely bit in the scripture where some people, some of the monks, go to these various high-standing monks and ask them, what's the path? What's the path to awakening? And they split into two main types. There's the one type led by the great venerable Kasapa, who's a big forest monk, hard on the rule and the Vinaya. And he says, look, you've got to keep the rules absolutely perfectly, and you've got to sit, meditate, meditate.

And then they go to this other side, which is more Sariputta, and he says, no, you've got to understand the Dhamma, you've got to learn the Dhamma, and you've got to meditate. So for that side, the rules don't take primacy. And so after that they went to the Buddha and said, well, we asked these people and they said this. And the Buddha says, no, that's all well and good. Everybody teaches you the way by which they themselves came. And they said, well, what would you ask us to do? He says, oh, meditate, meditate, meditate. So it's pretty direct.

So sure, there are some of us, some human beings, who are drawn to that path. Drawn to the path of just pure meditation. But for most of us, there is this path of action. And that's the way most of us go, I would have thought. So we've got to make that the path. We've got to make what we do the path to our own

awakening. If we don't, then we miss out on a chance. If we think that we're only working spiritually when we come on a weekend retreat or when we're doing meditation in the morning and evening, then a whole chunk of our lives is wasted. But when you actually turn to your work and see it as the vehicle, as your major vehicle, because heavens, it's the best eight hours of your day going into work. So when you see that as your major vehicle, then, of course, that's where your whole effort goes into making sure that vehicle's working for you. And that's the importance of right livelihood. And it's right there on the path. Number five. It is number five. Right livelihood.

So, once we understand that, once we understand the importance of right livelihood, then we need to reflect upon it. And keeping a diary, a spiritual diary, can be very helpful, at least to set us off, to start us going, where at the end of the day you write up what it is that you've done, and what you've learned from the day, and then your little *adhiṭṭhāna*, your little determination. And then in the morning to repeat that determination.

So when we come to see that, you see, the split that a lot of people make between the monastic life and the lay life, it doesn't appertain. The only plus, you might say, of a monastic life is that, of course, generally speaking, not always true, your companions tend to be of the same ilk, of the same interest, and they're actually supportive of your effort as you are of theirs. The problem with living in our society, which is all over the place spiritually, is that, of course, you often work with people whose intentions are quite the opposite.

In a more homogenous society, say in a Christian society, say in the Middle Ages, or even right up to, say, the 18th century before our own Enlightenment, or in present-day Muslim societies, they're probably the best examples, where you have a whole society which is centred upon a particular vision, upon a particular understanding. I suppose you could say the same of places like Japan or Thailand—then at least you're working with people of similar understandings who, well, Burma, yeah, Burma. People who have similar understandings, so you can appeal to people at that level of understanding about the spiritual life. In the West, that's very difficult because many people don't have that at all on the agenda. So in that way, that good companionship is the whole of our livelihood, then yes, there can be that draw of having to work with people who are not specifically supporting the way that you want to work.

But even so, if we look at that in a more positive way, rather than see it as a negative thing, then we can make that work for us too. Working with people who are negative towards what we're trying to do.

So I hope I've convinced you, without any shadow of a doubt, that the path to full awakening lies in the very work you're doing. Just like the biscuit. Yes, so any questions arising from that?

"Well, comments about your angry old lady, when you dealt with her, was the anger the only successful one?"

All four of them. Yeah, to deal with somebody with anger. I struggled with this myself over this business of

Iraq. And my essay on the subject, which of course you can all read, is on the website. And one of the things that helped me was to make a distinction between force and violence. When something is wrong, one has to use force to put it right. So, for instance, we have a police force. We don't have a police violence. We don't. And we expect the police to use appropriate means to stop violence, not inappropriate means. And that, of course, is a fine judgment, but it's to do really with attitude.

So I think in my case with the old lady, I think I might have been slightly more, shall we say, appealing to her, and sat by her and said, do you realise that since you've come here, you've done nothing but grumble? Do you realise that all you're doing is creating this very deep, unhealthy feeling within your own heart? You see, I could have taken her into my confidence, as it were, gently. As it was, I just plastered her with this little spike of anger. And of course, fine, she didn't grumble, but I'm sure she was still grumbling. I mean, it was still in her heart. So I don't think it achieved—she would say silence. But unfortunately, the occasion never arose for us to re-establish a warm relationship that had existed when I was being all compassionate and holding.

So in a sense, I don't think it was particularly skillful. It's one of those moot points that comes from justifiable anger. That's very difficult in Buddhist understanding, to justify anger as such. I mean, one can simulate anger, like you might do sometimes with a child. You can simulate anger and get what you want, but even that can have a—I mean, the child still receives it as anger, even if you don't feel it. So it always has some sort of backlash on it.

You might have caught that program, Supernanny. Have you seen that? Did you see some of that? Well, I was very—I wish I'd have seen all of those. I thought they were fantastic. But I only saw the one. And it was this family where the kids were just ruling the roost. There were four kiddies. Absolutely amazing. And this poor mother was just—she just didn't know how to handle them. And I thought the little girl was especially wonderful. And such a lively little personality. She was about six. And she wouldn't go to bed. She had to get up. And the advice was not to communicate.

Now, she was coming down to communicate, but the advice was to just gently take her by the hand and put her back in the bed. And it was just so funny listening to her comments, you know. "I don't want to go to bed. I'm fed up with it." But it was the father who was doing it. And as soon as she was down, he just gently took her hand and took her all the way upstairs and put her back to bed. Thirteen times it took. But after that, it completely stopped.

And it's that gentle way, that gentle insistence which gets the right response. So if he'd have done that angrily, then of course it would have layered onto the whole situation the anger, and it would have brought up in her anger and all that awful feeling comes up. And of course, that quality of patience—the Buddha calls it the highest form of ascetic practice. But it is, isn't it? It really is ascetic to have to stand there and take the punishment, as it were.

Are there any other questions that arise from Right Livelihood?

That business of stopping—of course, you can, especially if you're doing something on a machine or like a computer. Well, you're supposed to stop anyway, aren't you, after forty minutes or something? By law, isn't it? You're supposed to. So if you put your alarm clock on, your little watch alarm—I mean, I do it when I'm working because you just get so absorbed in the machine. Time just passes. And every time that bell goes, just to give yourself a break.

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