Living Life according to the Dhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 58:50

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

This evening I wanted to pre-empt a lot of questions over the weekend concerning daily life. Not all of them, but some of them. To look at the way the Buddha advises us to live, and then to try to explain what it means to take refuge and precepts, because that's the little ceremony that I offer on Sunday morning. And why we should do it, or why you might want to do it. The ceremony is on the Sunday just after breakfast, 9:30, and I'll talk about that tomorrow in more detail.

When the Buddha started to teach, the first people who were attracted to him were people who wanted to live a similar sort of ascetic life. And many of them had already been living the ascetic life, out in the jungle or the forests, going on alms round rather. That's the preferred state. That's the preferred expression, on alms round, not begging for food. And when they were attracted to him, he said, well, come and try. *Ehi passiko*.

There is of course the story about the women who turned up from his court later on in his dispensation, and I'm sure many of you know the story that when they turned up he didn't want to ordain them. He didn't think that they could take the life, and he refused them three times, which is basically no. But Ananda said, can women become fully liberated? And he said, yes. So he said, well, why not give them a chance? So he did. Ever since then, he's been blamed by the men.

Now, although that story exists, it would seem now actually that that's not quite right. Research has shown something else, that these people who turned up from court were in fact his own relatives. They were his stepmother, his wife and a few other court ladies. So they were obviously people who'd been living the good life. It would be difficult to wear rag robes. They would have been probably still wearing rag robes then, collect robes from the bodies of the dead, sew them up and boil, and that was it. Later on he made people cut them into squares so that when you look at a robe it looks like paddy fields with passages.

And then he made them dye it in arecanut, which turned into a sort of colour of, as one monk said, baby shit. So it's not particularly fashionable.

But there does seem to be, especially a nun there, the name of course escapes me, who seems to have asked him, it's in her verse, if you look at the verses left by the *Therīs*, by the enlightened women. There's one verse there where she states that when she asked the Buddha if she could join him, she'd already had *j hāna*, he said the same thing, *ehi*, come, *ehi passiko*, come and try.

So that was one part of it, and slowly but surely an institution developed, and an institution basically is determined by its rules and regulations. So there were general rules and regulations of the time, but as monks and nuns misbehaved then, or people complained about certain behavior, he would make a rule. One of the ones that you're all suffering from is not to eat after lunch. So that came about because lay people complained that the monks and nuns were turning up at all times and more than once for a bit of food. They got fed up and they said no, this is not right, going back to big bowls of food. So what are they doing all day, just sat there eating? So he made the rule that you can only go out once, it had to be in the morning and it had to be eaten before noon. And the monks complained because all the best foods cooked in the evening like in most cultures, but he was quite strict about that. He said no, if you want to join this dispensation, that's what you do.

So that was one side of his dispensation. The other side of course was that many lay people began to be attracted to his teachings, and so he began to develop a lay way of life because he had to answer their questions. And this comes out in the Eightfold Path, which we'll come to in a little bit. But the one thing that I really like to stress is that the jewel of the collection, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, in which the Buddha describes how to meditate, all the stuff you've been hearing from me is out of that discourse. Like feeling feelings in feelings and all that sort of stuff. That's all from this discourse.

That is addressed to the Kurus of *Kurusadhamma*. That's how the discourse opens. It always opens with where he was and who he gave the talk to. So he was in a place which was close to modern Delhi and he had been there before and he'd given teachings about mindfulness and meditation and all that. And when he came back he was taken by how committed the village was, the little town was, to the practice. And that's where he delivered this discourse.

So the discourse explaining the whole process of meditation, and it ends with, if you maintain your mindfulness for seven years, for sure you will be either a non-returner or fully liberated. Never mind seven years, seven months. Never mind seven months, seven weeks. Never mind seven weeks, seven days. That means you don't lose your attention for seven days. As we found out, that's a wee bit difficult. And it's good to remember that, he didn't pull any punches. He didn't think, well, only monastics with their special form of institution and life can become liberated. Not at all. And there are examples in the scriptures of many people becoming fully liberated. One is a cobbler.

He had to, shall we say, wandering through the countryside. That was his normal thing. He would go from one monastery to the next, spending so much time here, so much time there. And on the way, he would stay in little villages and towns. And in those days, the wandering ascetics seemed to be the entertainment. I mean, there was obviously folk entertainment, bands and jumping up and down, but they would have these big gatherings on full moon. And the people would go to the parks and they'd have these talks given to them by these ascetics, these spiritual seekers, and they'd be questions and all that sort of stuff.

And in fact, we know that the lay people complained to the Buddha that when we go to these teachers,

they always answer our questions and these teachers also give, these monks and nuns they also give talks, but yours sit like dumb pigs. So he said right, he made a rule. All these rules come about because of silly things like that. So he said if a monk or nun is asked a dharma question they have to respond. It's a rule.

So he has lots of advice concerning the lay life. And this comes out, as I say, in the Eightfold Path. So it's good to look at that. It's good to look at the Eightfold Path and see what he's actually saying.

So the first is right understanding, right attitude. So that's really what we've been developing over this week. We've been developing our understanding about the way things really are, and hopefully that will in time sink down into an attitudinal base, an attitude. And then from there there's an outflow. So that outflow is into right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

So now right, there's always the negative and the positive. So wrong speech of course, telling whoppers and coarse language and useless language and slander. Those are your four types of wrong speech, and all those bring us problems. Right speech is kindly. It's always from a position of kindness, which you can include any positive attitude of kindness from compassion, kindness from joy, sympathetic joy, kindness from friendliness, from *mettā*. Kindness, honest. That honesty even stretches to not to exaggerate. And then finally, which is the most difficult one, at a suitable time.

So if you want to say something to somebody which you know might upset them, then you have to choose your time, say it kindly, and be upfront about it. And that's what the Buddha is saying. If you choose the wrong time, then you can expect it to completely go wrong. So this idea of choosing the right time, a suitable time, I think is rather insightful. Sort of blurting out.

And that brings us all to this business of aggression and what's that other word where you're being direct, aggressive, assertive, that's right. To be assertive. So people think when you're assertive you have to stamp your foot and put your fist on your hips and say quite straightforward, I will not have this. But to be assertive is coming from a place of no fear, no aversion. That's what they feel. And when it comes from that place it can be terribly kind, but they know that you mean it.

A slight example which gives you some idea of that is, I remember Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she went to Lebanon when that dreadful stuff was going on and some school had been stuck in the middle of two firing lines it seems. And the school has lots of children in the school, they'd been caught in the school, and it was a dilemma as to what to do. They were very afraid to bring the kids out. It's very strange to see because I saw it on television, some of you might have seen it, and she's brought to the school. So I was thinking, why don't they shoot her in a crossfire? But anyway, the officials and all that, they brought her to this place where she could see the school, they told her what the situation was and what to do.

Well she had no problem. She just walked to the school and brought them out. Everybody else is so afraid and full of fear and all that confusion, but that's what had to be done, and she was prepared to perhaps sacrifice her life to at least make the attempt.

So when you find yourself in a position of being bullied or somebody saying something which is rather nasty and all that sort of stuff and you want to talk to them, it doesn't have to be upfront straight on the nose, I will not have this sort of behaviour. Coming from that position of no fear and no hatred, no aversion, to say it very kindly, look, I won't take that sort of language anymore. And it hits much more strongly. If there's any fear, any anger, then subconsciously they'll bounce back off it. So coming from equanimity is a much better place, whatever we do, always, always, always.

It's been a regular experience of mine. I wrote in one of my little diaries, I call them diaries, I call them blogs, on my monthly email where I came, we had to get rid of this big tree, this oak tree, because of oil tank regulations. And I came out of the house, and my neighbour was in an absolute rage. I've never seen, I mean, it was real rage. He completely lost it. And he was saying things like, I'm from Liverpool, and I'll have you shot. Don't say much for Liverpool. A killer, that.

And oh, he doesn't listen to this tape. And the lumberjack who was okay by the way and quite an expert, he was standoffish, he seemed to be very cool, but that's because he had these two great big strapping young lads next to him. And I came out into this and I thought, so I thought it was nothing to do with me, so I was really calm, cool, collected, the peacemaker, and I said, what's going on? And he raged on about this tree should have never been cut, it's not our tree, we've had all this business before, somebody was fined so many thousand pounds, on and on and on.

And then he turns on me and he says, and I'm going to drive my tractor up and down the side of your fence all day to disturb me, all sorts of stuff. And finally sort of cool him down and say, well, and then he realised that I'd employed this lumberjack, he wasn't part of Satipanya. That cooled him down a bit. And very slowly over a little bit of period of time he sort of began to cool down, and this guy then approached and reminded him that he just threatened him with his life. A simple apology would do, and finally he just made a very quick apology. That was good, and he went out with his tail between his legs. He'd got the whole situation completely wrong.

And it was, I mean, I don't know whether I would have reacted like that if I'd have been there at the beginning of the argument. It was that I entered into it thinking it was nothing to do with me. I was absolutely stable, and when he turned on me I was able to maintain that sort of stability. And that immediately gave nothing for this rage to hang on to. So that's always a little example from my own life telling me that equanimity is always the best policy.

So that's this right speech business, approaching people in a way which is always kind. And kindness undermines any form of anger. It's got nothing to hold on to. As you know, if somebody approaches you in a sort of accusatory way, as soon as you say, I'm sorry, that undermines the whole thing. And then, of course, you prove it was their fault. But it's just always undermining their anger is part and parcel of the good life. Which as we can see doesn't stop you from getting your point across. It's just making that little distinction there.

So it's a good thing to keep in mind the distinction between being aggressive and being assertive. And that when we're assertive it doesn't have to be done with a sort of strict, loud voice coming from the position of righteousness. I mean, that's basically another form of aggression in a way. So this right speech has always the negative side and the positive side with these instructions.

When it comes to right action, that's normally described as these five precepts that we say in the morning. And it's basically, that's what you don't do. So we try not to harm any living being, not to kill any living being, not to harm any living being. Well, I mean, as soon as you take that position, then of course you move towards caring for all living beings.

And, of course, this takes us into that whole area of vegetarianism, which is a constant question within Buddhist circles. Should we be vegetarian? In Buddhist culture, the only vegetarians that I know of are the Chinese monks. They can be very strict vegetarian. And I once did a wedding ceremony for a Chinese woman who was marrying an Englishman. And after the ceremony, she came up to me quite worried and said that at the banquet, at the banquet which they would have after this ceremony, they'd be eating meat. So I gave her the normal line that the Buddha didn't ban eating meat. That wasn't the problem. So, it's up to a person's sensibility, really.

At the monastery I joined in Sri Lanka, one of the monks rather proudly came up to me and said, we're vegetarians, because monks eat meat if they're offered meat. It's not a problem, but the message had gone out that monks at Kanduboda were vegetarians. So I'd not been there for two or three meals when fish turns up. And so I didn't say anything, of course. One has to be careful. And I heard later that a rather wry Westerner had said that, well, in Sri Lanka, fish are self-propelling, automated vegetables.

So that's it, you see. So it depends where you draw the line. As you know, in Western culture, the Benedictines were vegetarian, but they did eat fish. They had pools in which they kept fish. So, you know, fish vegetarians.

The problem is not the eating of meat, of course, it's the killing of the animal. And it's up to a person to decide, you know, where they are in that sort of loop. So of course when you buy the meat you support the butcher and so on and so forth and it depends on really what your body needs. So I know a woman who has only got half a kidney you see and basically she has to eat meat it seems. There's also this argument of blood groups, certain blood groups are meat eaters rather than vegetarian eaters which mirror our ancestral history. But I think it's up to every individual to decide whether they want to be vegetarian or not or even vegan or not. It's up to you.

As a monastic of course because you're receiving alms, that's what you eat, you see, because you haven't been in that loop. This is the point, you see. You might say, well, you hold your bowl out and you get a great big chunk of beef. I mean, you know. But the thing is that monks don't invite people to give them food, you see. They can say, I prefer to be vegetarian. In Burma, during the rainy season, when monks and nuns gather to do special practice, often they'll take a vegetarian vow. But if I know that you've killed an

animal to feed me, I can't eat it. That's my rule. If it's a leftover or it's part of something and then I turn up at the door with me bowl and you say, I'm a monkey again, give me... took a leg of chicken in there, then that would be allowable. But if I'd known you'd rip this leg off, especially for me, then the chicken was hopping around, I'd have to refuse it, you see.

So there's this whole murky area around vegetarianism where the Buddha didn't basically make any strict laws. And you must remember that in those times there was famine. And you had to kill your livestock to keep alive. And how are you going to teach the Buddha Dhamma to Eskimos? Or Inuits rather, as they prefer these days. Or people who live in deserts. So it's like there's no... In this idea of a relative universe, everything dependent on something else, you can't make absolute laws. Even killing, you can't make an absolute law about killing. When I was at the monastery in Burma it was regularly fumigated for mosquitoes so nobody complained about that. So there are different degrees of moral law out there, you know, and it's up to the individual to decide where they are. That's all. So it's very rare that something is absolutely black and white.

So the second one, of course, is not to take what is not freely given. So that's a pretty, when you think about things that you might even, you might become sensitive to taking even a pen home from work, you see, because it's not given for that reason. So it gets, the more you get into these rules and regulations, the more refined they become. It's not just, you know, thieving something.

In the Buddhist monk's rules, if I have a liking for that bowl, for instance, it's a singing bowl, and I think, hmm, and I'm looking around to see if I can just slip it in my bag and borrow it, you see, then of course that's still at the thought level. So I haven't actually broken any rule. All rules to do with monks and nuns are to do with action. And then if I come in again and see that rule, you see, and then I'm overtaken by my desire to slip it away, and my hand moves towards it, but I don't actually, you know, even to the point of touching it, you see, that's called a *dukkata*, that's a bad thing to do. Moving it, moving towards it, you see. If I touch it, then that's called a heavy offense, you see.

Now if I move it a nano centimetre and then decide not to take it I've still committed an act of theft and I'm no longer a monk. Yeah. See, so the Buddha is quite clear about what constitutes an act and what doesn't constitute an act, see. So if you take that into all sorts of areas of your life you can see so long as it's in the mind it's not manifested outward, it's not done harm out there. It's done harm within here if you've indulged it, but it's not done harm out there. And so long as you're moving towards something, towards you're about to do something, of course, you're now into a dangerous area where you might, you know, might actually find yourself doing something you didn't want to do. But once you've actually done it, even if you then decide not to do it, but once it's done, it's done. That's it. The act is complete, you see.

Of course, the consequence is different. The consequence of, say, just moving that bowl a nanocentimetre and then saying, whoa, no, and then walking away, well, there's going to be no consequence to that. But to actually stick it in my coat and shoot off with it and be caught at the gates, that could be... My whole

reputation as a completely enlightened being might just fall apart. You can't imagine the Buddha shoplifting, can you? It wouldn't sort of fit.

So, you know, that whole business about not taking. Now, the opposite of cow, of course, is generosity. Move towards generosity. And generosity was the subject that the Buddha always began his talks with when he talked to lay people, because anybody can be generous even a thief can be generous with the stuff we've just thieved. So generosity is not, it's a sort of, it comes prior in a sense to the rule about taking and not taking. Anybody can be generous with what they have. And remember generosity is to do with both time, both wealth and time, and that's what it leads to, you see.

Once you stop thinking about what I want, you see. So at the worst end, it's taking something which is not ours, right? But then in the middle, it's this sort of greed of always wanting something. It's always wanting what other people have and envy and jealousy and all that sort of stuff, you see. And when all that passes, where does that energy go, you see? All that wanting, you see, it moves outwards into wanting others to have it. And that's this natural transformation of the negative side of our characters and personalities towards the positive. It just happens naturally.

And I think one way that we can judge, it's one of those words, isn't it? One way that we can see that we're progressing spiritually is that we're getting far more delight in giving than in receiving. That's always a good sign, that you delight in giving. That's one of the Buddha's phrases, to delight in giving.

The third one is normally translated as around sexual activity, not to abuse our sexual activity. And of course in those days, as in previous times in the West, that would have been confined to the married life, to a proper to that type of relationship. These days of course it sort of lengthens out to a loving relationship doesn't it, you know. Whenever I talk about this I always say this of course that sex is just by itself it becomes an empty experience and then I always quote Woody Allen but as empty experiences go... Laughter. Laughter.

So you see it's just one of those things but really that precepts I think you can lengthen it out to any lust for anything, lust for food, lust for getting out into the open. It's just that part of us that is, you know, overreaching, you know, overreaching again. It always comes back to this seeking happiness in the sensual world, it's...

The fourth one is wrong. Oh, wait a minute. I said wrong speech first, did I? So it should have been not to harm any living beings, wrong speech. That should have come fourth, actually. Sorry. And then there was not to take what is not freely given. And then there's this business of not to abuse the senses. And then finally, always a tricky one for a Western culture, not to take drigs and drunks. Drigs and drunks. Drinks and drugs that cloud the mind, you see.

So the normal question is well what's wrong with a, you know, what's wrong with a glass of wine, you know, especially if you're French. What's wrong with a glass of wine? Italian, I mean how can you, how

can you not have a glass of wine with your spaghetti? So really again this comes back to the individual. I mean generally speaking in our culture to have a glass of wine with food is neither here nor there, it's not... But in the scriptures, the reason for this is that under the influence of, you do things which you would not normally do. That's the problem with specifically alcohol.

And it's up to a person's refinement. I mean, I, you know, some monks would, some teachers would say that you mustn't ever go near alcohol, you know, that sort of stuff. But it's up to the individual to decide what mental state arises when they take alcohol. I remember when I first started meditating I'd come out of an evening session and I hadn't eaten and I went into a pub and I had half a bitter, you see, just to test it actually, to test the effect of half a bitter on the antibody. That's true. I did, I did, I did. And I drank this half of it and I sat there and I swear I felt this curtain fall down on the brain. It just came right down and I thought well this is it, you see. This is what it does. It, it sort of does have, even a small amount of alcohol does have an effect on your level of consciousness and what, what you're doing.

So considering that we're trying to develop our awareness, you know, the last thing we want to do is do something which is underlying that development. So again it's left up to the individual. The western, the eastern culture is not so alcoholic based as you know. I mean they have alcohol but as far as I know there's none of this, there's none of the culture of wine, culture of tea but not of wine.

And when it comes to recreational drugs, well, that's the same thing. Recreational drugs distort your consciousness, so you'd have to decide whether that's what you want to do or not. So that whole area, really, for somebody who is bent on purifying their minds and on consciousness, then, of course, they'd come off all that stuff.

So those are the five basic rules, you might say, of what not to do. But that doesn't cover, in a sense, all the goodnesses that we're asked to develop. So the four of them, the four illimitables, are love, compassion, joy, and peace. And I'll say more about that tomorrow when we do the loving-kindness meditation, the *met ta*. But these are your basic relationships to life and they're illimitable because the development of the mind is seemingly indefinite. It's a bit like number, no matter how great a number you can conceive you can always add one. It's like an eternity of numbers.

So it's the same with the mind, the heart. You can continue to develop it. And there are meant to be innumerable number of beings. So you can be there forever offering metta and an occasional lunch break.

The others are the seven, the ten *parami*. Parami means the other shore. And it's normally translated as perfections, which is a bit, you know, that gives you the idea that you've come to the end of this, you know, a perfection. But basically they're virtues. I would much prefer the word virtues. And they include a host of things. I'll just read them out. Parami.

The first one is this generosity. The second one is moral, the moral law which we've discussed. The third one is renunciation. So here we have to make, you know, I think I've said before the distinction between

self mortification and renunciation. Renunciation is giving up something to see what our attachment is to it and in seeing our attachment we wait for that attachment to go, you see.

So one of the things I've suggested is whatever your most enjoyable program is on the telly, to sit there with a cup of tea and a biscuit and don't turn it on. And just feel the pain. So you wait for it to pass, wait for it to pass, and keep doing that until it's all gone and you don't care about that program anymore. So then you can watch it.

Wisdom, of course, energy, so that's, you know, that business of right energy, putting the right energy into something. Patience, the Buddha calls the highest form of ascetic practice, to be able to bear with, not to lose one's patience over things, to become irritable, you know, and all that. So, of course, that, to be patient, you have to sit in the other person's place, don't you? You have to be in the other person's side to understand why they're behaving like that, you know. Why the train is late, you know, all that sort of stuff.

Truthfulness, we've talked about. Resolution, you see, you hear me go on and on about resolution. So there it is in one of the *parami*. It's a commitment, you see. You keep making resolutions. Even if you fail, it doesn't matter. You just keep putting energy into a resolution. And eventually, it grows in energy, you see. And it takes a hold on us.

Loving kindness, metta, which we'll do tomorrow, and of course equanimity.

And I'll just read out what this says in the commentary, which sort of puts them all together for us, so that you can understand that although there is this negative, you know, what we shouldn't do, there's much more about what we should be doing to develop our hearts and develop our relationship to the world. So here's what the... what it said in the *Visuddhimagga*. Visuddhimagga is a later work which is considered the handbook, really, of Theravada Buddhism, and it's probably one of the greatest spiritual classics of the world, really.

But this is what it says, anyway. As the great being, meaning someone destined to become liberated or Buddhahood, are concerned with the welfare of living beings, not tolerating the suffering of beings, wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings, and being impartial and just to all beings, therefore they give arms to all beings so that they may be happy, without investigating whether they are worthy or not. By avoiding to doing them harm they observe morality, and in order to bring morality to perfection they train themselves in renunciation.

In order to understand clearly what is beneficial and injurious to beings, they purify their wisdom. For the sake of the welfare and happiness of others, they constantly exert their energy. Though having become heroes through utmost energy, they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings. And once they have promised to give or to do something, they do not break their promise. With unshakable resolution, they work for the will and welfare of beings. With unshakable kindness, they are

helpful to all. And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return.

See? That's nice, isn't it? Very good. So that's the positive side of our... what you might call right action.

Then there's the we move on now to right livelihood. So there are those livelihoods we're not supposed to get involved in like, well, one of them is of course killing animals and arms trafficking, human beings. I mean, you know, you can think of those. But the big thing about livelihood is not what you do but how you do it. See, this is, I think this is the real core of the thing. Whether we're doing some, you know, some of the unskilled jobs of society, you know, like clearing parks, cleaning, that sort of thing, or whether we're doing some of the most highly skilled work in society, in spiritual terms it's irrelevant. In spiritual terms it's the attitude of which you do it.

So if you see what you're doing as a service then it becomes a spiritual practice. And once we've grasped that then, you know, it makes, it makes work very worthwhile because all the things that we might suffer at work such as the boredom of it or the tedium of it or the...

the fact that other people are nasty to us all that whole area you see when it becomes at the service of when it's a service that you're giving then it all becomes very worthwhile and I think that's you know if we start from that if in the morning you see having done your two hours meditation you sit quietly and offer *metta* to all beings you see and then you get round to work see where you're going to spend really the better part of our lives you know eight hours a day or so and so you sit there you see and you just consider what you do and you do it for the benefit of see for the benefit of the people you're working with for the benefit of the firm or the organisation and through that for the benefit of all and if we engender that within us of course then it becomes meaningful no matter what we're doing.

When I was a kid you know I got a job from school. I worked in a cake factory. And they had this belt, you know, with the cakes coming off. And there was a group of women, see, and they put me on the end of the line. And the women, of course, were very used to this sort of work, and I'd just joined them. And they were very quick with their hands and could keep up quite complex conversations. My job was to stick this damn cherry on the top. And every time I missed, I had to shut the machine down. They got a bit upset with me. And I didn't quite get the hang of it. They didn't give me enough time. They'd have given me half a day to get into it. But they were very kind. "He's only a lad, leave him alone."

Now you think, well, how could you do something like that and turn that into a spiritual practice? Especially on a sort of production line like that. How could you do that, you see? Well, if you think about it, it's an enormous, you know, if I'd have known, if I'd have been into this sort of practice, this was an enormous opportunity to develop moment-to-moment concentration. Right attitude, completely there with the cherry on the cake. Just like that, on the cake, on the cake. Instead I was, "Oh, bloody hell, I've been doing this for all day." And of course, if you're on the line, you're on the line for hours. You know, it's two hours, ding, the bell goes off, a cup of tea, bang, off you go again. I once had a job just punching holes in this damn thing that shot, you know, in front of my eyes.

So any situation can be seen as having potential for some sort of spiritual practice. So, yes, that is service. Service is the important thing to remember when it comes to work.

So now, you know, if we leave it all there in terms of general guidelines about our lives, I mean, there's books written on it, lots of good books about daily life and all that. The idea of taking refuges and precepts for the people who do it is that, in a sense, you've got to have some sort of reference point in the spiritual life. It doesn't matter what it is so long as it's obviously worthwhile. But if you keep hopping from here to there then it's like you're using different value systems which eventually can just confuse you, see.

So if we look at our lives and think well, is there an authority, a final authority I go to for moral problems, for actual guidance? Is there a moral authority, an ethical authority I go to whom I really trust and from there I would be able to put into context any other information I get, any other spiritual instruction I get? If you take that position it doesn't stop you from this authority taking in other teachings, other traditions, except that it has to make sense to this central authority. If it doesn't you've got two authorities and that's when your confusion starts. Like who do I follow, what should I do? And the idea of taking refuges and precepts is at one level it can be a very general commitment to the spiritual life and at others it can be quite specific.

Okay, so we take refuge in the Buddha. So the Buddha is a historical personage. We have lots of information about his life and how he lived. We have lots of information about the people around him at the time, with an enormous amount of information about his teachings and what he proposed. And to take refuge in that is to take refuge in not simply some personage but an exemplar. So this is your example, you see. And in a sense the Buddha is mirroring some archetypes within us. There's something in us that has to be liberated.

And so that would, and the Buddha's path is, shall we say, specific to the Buddha. If you were a Christian, then Jesus, Jesus Christ would be your central authority. So often I get, for instance, people who are Christians saying, "Can I meditate," you see? So my answer is, I don't see a confusion, but you've got to make sense of this within the teachings of Jesus Christ, see? And if you can't, then it creates a contradiction. It just creates wasted energy.

So some people, of course, won't go near other practices who are more fundamentalist Christians. But there are many monks and nuns, actually, within Christianity, within the Catholic tradition, and also the Anglican tradition here in Britain, who practice some form of Buddhist meditation. And there's a nun who lives who lives out in the Brecon Beacons there and she holds the Chan lineage, the Chinese Buddhist lineage, and she's also an ordained Anglican nun under the Archbishop, Archbishop Canterbury. So she's able to hold these two without contradiction. For her it's a great sort of exploration, but for others it would be impossible.

So it's the same with people who are committed to the Buddha. They wouldn't see it possible to do something like yoga or to practice any other form apart from something which is strictly within the

Buddhist tradition. But in our post-modern world where people gather their own spiritual portfolio, the problem is not the amount of choice we have but to make it make sense to some sort of central position. So this is what I mean by having some sort of commitment to a fundamental authority from which you move and you can accept teachings from all traditions and practices from all traditions which make sense to you, which makes sense to that authority.

So in the widest sense, to take refuge in the Buddha is to take refuge within one's own Buddha nature rather than being too specific about this personage in the past. Your absolute refuge is in the Buddha, but because this is connected to the historical Buddha, then the historical Buddha becomes your point of reference.

Now what do we mean by that? The Buddha says quite clearly, "Who sees me sees the Dhamma. Who sees the Dhamma sees me." What he's saying is that his life, his teachings are an expression of the truth. So what we're really taking refuge in is the Dhamma. And I know that we in the West we're called Buddhists, but that's not what Buddhists call themselves. Originally they used to call themselves *Saddhamikas*, which means followers of the true law. And you'll still get that translation in certain Chinese texts.

So we're always coming back not to a person. It's not a guru based dispensation. It's a *dhamma* based dispensation. It's about the teaching. And the teaching has both the theoretical side and the practice. And that's the *dhamma*, see, the Buddha-*dhamma*. So you'll find some people are committed to Buddhism, being called Buddhist, getting very upset about being called Buddhists, you see. They don't like being called Buddhists. They want it to be called Buddha-*dhamma*, you see, because Buddhism, the word Buddhist centres us too much upon the personage of the Buddha. Whereas in fact that's not the way the Buddha saw himself. The Buddha said, "Who sees the Dhamma sees me," see.

So when we take refuge in the Dhamma, it is taking refuge in these two factors, both the theory and the practice. And then finally it's the Sangha. So the Sangha is all those people, traditionally all those people who've experienced *Nibbāna*. So they stand as witness to the Buddha's own experience. And that's the real refuge.

But of course it can open out, and these days in the West the word Sangha, which is normally restricted to the ordained Sangha, is used to mean any Buddhist community. And I think the reason for that is that there doesn't seem to be a word whereby Buddhists can refer to themselves. So when you refer to yourself, to your group, you might say well this is the Gaia Sangha. And I think that's where, in a country which is all Buddhist you don't have to do that, everybody is Buddhist. But here in the West where every religion under the sun can be found, then there has to be some way in which people who are committed to the Buddha-*dhamma* refer to themselves. And the word that's been chosen is Sangha, which means community.

When the Buddha, when he's dying or towards the end of his life, he says that he's happy that he's been able to establish the four assemblies. That's how it's translated. It's a slightly different word, the four

assemblies. The monks and nuns, the lay women and the lay men. And he talks about them as being four assemblies. He doesn't use the word Sangha there, you see. But we, you know, I don't see any problem at all in when we take refuge in the Sangha, we take refuge in, in a restricted sense, of those people who've been fully liberated because they are again our exemplars. But they're also all those people who are practicing with us. And all those people in a sense who are practicing spiritually, they're all part of our support system.

People often say, "Well, it must, you know, it's difficult being a lay person and practicing." Well that's because of the fragmented nature of our society and its enormous restlessness. If you think of say Islam, if you were a Muslim and you went to somewhere like Saudi Arabia and right there at the prayer time, right there when you're having your, if they cos a coffee I presume it's in Saudi Arabia, I can't imagine it not being in Saudi Arabia, and you suddenly stop everything and bow towards Mecca, nobody would bat an eyelid, you know. That's what you do.

Now, if you did that in Britain, you know, you'd probably get locked away or something, you know, you'd sort of carry away. If you, you know, we live in that sort of society where spiritual practice is seen as sort of, well, it's your own thing, it's your own thing, you know, and you keep it to yourself. And generally speaking, it's a bit odd, a bit off, you know. It's all right if you're one of the regular ones, you know. But like, you know, even to the point where people can't wear their insignia, it's become sort of peculiar. You remember that nurse who had to take the crucifix? The stewardess, yeah, I mean, it just becomes, in a sense, pathetic, really, because of this inability, really, to see a spiritual path. You know, it's just one of those things. Everybody's afraid of, you know, fundamentalism and how wild it can get.

So that's this taking of refuges and the precepts, of course, we discussed earlier. So now if it occurs to you that you'd like to do that, what I do, what I suggest, is that you take it for a time. So one year, you see, and if you act according to your commitment, at the end of that one year you can see whether it's been of benefit to you. So that's up to you. Some people take it for life. They've already got that feeling about that commitment. I'd been working with Zen Buddhism only for about a year and a half and I just knew this was the answer to my problem. So I ordained very early on really up at Throssel Hole Abbey there. The Jukai ceremony takes five days for heaven's sakes. By the end of it you definitely know you've committed yourself. This is just a 15 minute ceremony. And if you do, if you think well you might want to take it for a year or for longer, five years, it doesn't really matter.

It's nice to take a name. It's nice to choose a virtue which you'd like, you know, particularly to develop. And if you give me that word I'll find the *dhamma* equivalent and that becomes as it were your little secret spiritual name, you see, which you mustn't use as a password except on *dhamma* sites.

So that's it. So there's plenty of time tomorrow for you to consider this. And if you want to, you're very welcome. So on the Sunday after breakfast, 9:30, we'll gather here. And it's done in a repetition way, not like we do in the morning where we all chant. It's as though I'm handing you the tradition. So I chant and

then you chant, you see. And then after that I'll explain it more on the day, but that's the main part of the ceremony.

I hope I've given you an overall general view of the Buddha's teaching when it comes to how to live and that there is maybe a time in your life when you want to just commit yourself to it. So you just stop all the maybes and ifs and all that and just see if it works for you.

Those of you who did it last year, for instance, if you want to recommit, that's also possible. And you can also change your name. Even we can change our names. There was a monk who was named after one of the early disciples of the Buddha who'd been one of his companions. And it was rather unfortunate in English. He was Dutch himself. The word was Whopper. So in time he had that changed to *Jñana Tusita*, which means the heavenly realm of knowledge. Yeah, it was rather funny that.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and I trust that you will continue your practice and deepen your insights and arrive at that wonderful place of liberation sooner rather than later.

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