Practice into Daily Life (Christmas 2006)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 48:40

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I just thought this evening I'd try to make some connections between the practice we're doing and daily life, and to somehow do that by going through the Eightfold Noble Path, which some of you will know by heart.

The first is right understanding. So when the Buddha talks about right understanding, he's talking about what we were discussing this morning, beginning to see things as they really are. So that quality of transience, that quality of impermanence — we tend to sit and then we get up and we forget about it and get on with life. And in a sense, that doesn't allow it to seep through. It doesn't allow the small insights we might get when we're sitting to actually dig deep.

One thing that you might try is to set a day in which you keep reminding yourself to be aware that everything is actually passing away. It's easy for us to see the beginning of things. To see the beginning of things for us, the word "new" is something we're quite aware of. But to see the ending of things — like what happened to the old pop stars? Actually, we know they're all coming back, aren't they? It's a bad example. It's like the ending of things isn't something we like to particularly see because, of course, it connects us with our own ending.

But to wake up in the morning and to begin to recognise that something has finished, something has gone. You close the door of the house before you leave and you notice that all that time spent getting up and getting out has gone, it's finished. Where is it? People come in and out of your vision, you have a chat and they go, and then you stop and you think, that's gone, that's finished. What we normally do is, as soon as something's finished, we're off onto something new. We don't recollect, we don't actually notice that something's actually gone, finished, kaput, dead, like Monty Python's parrot is finished.

And it's bringing that consciousness to mind all the time, that things are finishing, finishing, finishing. Because we're always aware of the newness of things, because we always make that quick link into something new, something else, there comes that delusion of continuity. We don't actually see that things are discontinuous, that there is a rising and a passing away, and that that passing away is really a full stop before something else can happen. I mean, without that, presumably, you couldn't get creativity in the universe. But for us, that's a frightening point, because we see things arising, we're always on that little excitement, we're always looking forward to something coming. We're never looking back to see something going.

When you stand at a river and you're on a bridge, just look one way, the way the river's flowing, and just catch how you feel about that, what effect it has on you — flowing away from you — and then turn around and see it coming towards you and just see how you feel about that. They're two very different positions on the same bridge. And if there's a puddle somewhere, just look into that — there's still water — and see how you feel about that. So this quality of *anicca* is called transience, impermanence. You can't just leave it when you get up; it's got to be part of the way we see things.

Now when you do begin to see the ending of things, what comes up? Well, there's a lot of fear. You might panic even. I'm not putting you off. But there's fear there because we've never looked, we've never really accepted that things totally and utterly disappear. Last weekend — middle of the week, Thursday — I was at a funeral for the head monk who was the chief monk at the London Vihara after a very long illness. And looking at the corpse, because they had him lying in state, just looking at the corpse, I could see my mind making that face move. I was putting life back into something which was dead, it was gone. And I can see how it's difficult to accept that what you're looking at is nothing. There's no difference between the coffin it's in and what it is. It's lifeless, it's gone. And that's what the mind's always doing.

Now when we say the mind, we're talking about the way it creates pictures, the way it creates stories, the way it's always creating a future for us. But of course the question is why? Why is it doing that? And then you get down to this idea of a self, this idea of who I am. And this "I am," when you look at it and you begin to define it, you find it is locked into this life form. "I am me." When you start defining that in the way that other people might define you, you're talking about character, personality, your job, your friendships — it's all me, me.

Now once we've taken that position, in a sense we're in a very unfortunate place because this me wants to be happy. That's the drive, isn't it? I don't think anybody would deny that at the deepest level we'd like to just be happy. That's basically accepted by all philosophies, whether they dream of heaven or whatnot. The idea is I want to be happy. Whatever that might mean, I just want to be happy.

So now I'm in this world, I'm in this body, I'm in this world around me, and I've got to make it work. So you can see how quickly the idea of making something work begins to be a collection of things that make me happy. That collection is the attachment to things. It's the gathering of things, the accumulation.

Now, once I've got all these things, well, I've got to watch out for people who might take them away. So immediately, as soon as I hold on to something, I'm in a state of conflict with the world. Even if it's a vase which nobody wants, nobody would ever want, it may break. So I've got to be especially careful that it isn't broken. See, as soon as you hold on to something, whether you like it or not, you're in a state of conflict.

So, recognising that the conflict is there, and the conflict has this two-edge. It's either one where you have to annihilate the opposition or run from it. In the Pali word, this is all included in one word, *taṇhā*. And you can translate it perhaps easily as wanting, not wanting. But it doesn't get the full force of that without recognising that there are these three positions that we take of accumulation, rejection, annihilating

something and running for it.

Now, you have to bring that into your daily life. It's all right sitting here and noticing that when a beautiful thought comes up, one wants to begin to develop it, to begin a story around it. When something unpleasant turns up, like anxiety or something, you can see that you don't look at that. You want to get over here somewhere, constantly pushing away. But you have to bring that into your daily life from the moment you get up to going through — like when you arrive at work, it might be there's just that sickly feeling. Not always. And you have to acknowledge that. Sometimes we just brush it aside, but it's actually being with all the stuff that's coming up, which is manifesting to us this delusion. That's the point. All this negativity, all this attachment, all that, they're the measure of our delusion, how the delusion manifests for us.

And it's by being in contact with that throughout the day, which, as it were, throws you into this other position, a position which you've discovered in your meditation, of just coexisting peacefully with these states of mind, not allowing them to hijack your life, not allowing them to overpower you. So all this business that we're doing here of observing that, we have to find a way of bringing it into our daily life.

And again, you can set yourself a day that this day I'll just notice how greedy I am. This day I'll notice how irritated I've become at the smallest things. Because these things become habitual, we're inured to them. We're not actually in contact with the feelings as they come up in their rawness. We're always just looking askance, looking away from them. And you keep going.

But remember that these things have a life of their own. They're an energy, they're a force within the psyche. And we know from our own blessed Freud that these things creep out in the most unfortunate ways. And the way you say things, slips of the tongue and things like that — very embarrassing. So it's that, it's actually becoming much more aware of that, taking your meditation, taking that awareness into daily life.

This business of *anattā* — not self — what does that mean, not self? Well, the simplest of things. Like you take your socks off and you find that your toenails have grown. Who grew them? Did you have anything to do with it? It was just there. I mean, you cut them a while back and now they're back. You never felt them grow. But you insist, "This is my toenail." But then you cut it off and it's lying there and you forget about it and somebody says, "Is that your toenail?" And you've still got it, even though it's on the piece, it's still "my toenail."

And it's looking into the body and just asking yourself, what do you know? Do you know what your liver's doing now? Have you ever really experienced the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs? And yet we have this peculiar feeling that this is my body. But when you investigate it, you find that you hardly know anything. You hardly experience anything of your body, apart from when it hurts and tickles. That's it.

And when we talk about self, there's an understanding there of some sort of control, an agent. "I'm in charge." And then suddenly you're ill. We didn't decide that. And it's catching the fact that the control we have over the body is minimal. It's like a car. You can take it left, you can go right, you can go fast and forward, but you can't do anything about the wearing of the tyres. If the engine blows up, that's the way it is. If the oil starts leaking out, how do you know? You only know when the engine stops.

So when you look into yourself and you begin to investigate these things, then you get that feeling of being a sort of an alien within your own body. Very strange. And again there might be a little fright comes up.

Now all that fright, all that fear that comes up around this, all that not wanting, that ignoring, is a measure of the delusion. That's how the delusion manifests to us. You might glibly say, "Oh well I'm not afraid of death. I'm afraid of dying, but I'm not afraid of death." But you haven't a clue till you're up against it. It's a horrible thing. Because everything you think you are seems to be coming to an end. Completely. It's like they asked of the old rich woman, how much did she leave? He said, "Everything." And it is grasping that, it is grasping the fact that when you come across death.

Now, if you look at any spiritual tradition, they always have that contemplation. In medieval times, they used to have a little *memento mori*, didn't they? A little skull on the desk, just to remind them that there was an end to things. Now, that contemplation of death is very much part of the practice. The main scripture on how to do this practice, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse, the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, there's a whole section there about looking at dead bodies, corrupt and disappear into little bits of dust. A whole section. It says, and the commentary says you have to go to one of these charnel grounds, because in those days they just left the body out in the open and the animals and birds ate it. And you're supposed to just watch this process. And as you're watching it, you're supposed to be saying, "As that body is, this body will be." A bit frightening, eh?

And it gives a nice little direction not to sit upwind. Very detailed description on how to do meditation on a rotting dead body.

So these three characteristics — the sense of impermanence, everything stopping, everything coming to an end, the idea of possession, the idea of me, and this idea of control — and to actually bring it in as a daily practice. And that's how your meditation begins to seep through your life.

Now that's the negative side, that's all the horrible bit. The other side is the right attitude, getting the right attitude. So as we said this morning, whenever we sit in meditation, there is some purification going on. Something is exhausting itself, even if we can only weigh it in nanograms. Now there has to be that little effort to change it, to move it towards the positive side.

I was telling somebody just in the last break that a woman came to me and said that her partner complained that every time she sat, she did a sitting, she was cold and not responsive, poor man. And I asked her, I said, "Well, what do you do?" She said, "I just sit and then get up." I said, "Well, no. You've got

to do the *mettā*." See, somehow you've got to reconnect.

So when you sit, you've taken this very special position within yourself of being the observer. To do that, you've got to create this sort of distance. And that distance, if you maintain it, can become slightly calloused. You can sometimes confuse equanimity with a lack of connection with something. But equanimity is a receptivity. It's a complete receptivity. So you are supposed to be connected. But because we take this position within ourselves of pointing and noting things, sometimes we pull back too far. We pull back too far, and we get into this position of not being able to reconnect.

A story that I like to tell around this is that I turned up to visit one monk, and there was a cat playing with a dead mouse. I mean, the cat had already killed it. And I asked him, I said, "Why don't you stop that?" And he said, "Well, it's cat kamma. It's mouse kamma. That's what they do. It's nothing to do with me. I'm just a monk."

I went to another monastery, I was just staying there, and something quite wonderful happened. This cat suddenly leapt out and jumped on this bird. And this monk got up as quick as lightning, gave this cat one hell of a thump, and took the bird out of his mouth and held it up and realised it was killed, the lungs had been punctured. So he held it up in the air and he chanted, "All things arise and pass away" in the Pali. "All compounded things arise and pass away."

So you see, we have a distinction here. What this other monk didn't recognise about the cat and the mouse was that his consciousness, his awareness was also part of that kamma. So he's unable to connect because he's found this place of equanimity, which has actually become very dry, very unconnected.

Now, I'm not suggesting that that would happen when somebody is meditating, say, in the morning and the evening, because daily life drags you into connection, whether you like it or not. But what we can do is, as it were, prepare ourselves for the day of doing this metta practice.

Now, what metta does is it gives us a basic relationship to people. And the best word for it is goodwill. I know it's sometimes translated as loving kindness, but that's a bit sloppy for me. It's more like getting your intentions right. What are your intentions towards people?

Now, supposing you're having difficulty with somebody at work. Normally speaking, what people do is they stir it, don't they? They sort of stir it round and round inside themselves. They sort of boil gently, and then they're ready for a good punch-up when they walk into work.

Now if you see that that's doing nothing apart from just creating a lot of heat and you turn that heat through the *metta* into a way of open-heartedness towards that person... Now you know that we're very sensitive to the way people look at us from quite a distance. You can tell somebody walking down towards you whether they're going to greet you with a smile or not — it's already in their body language.

So when you walk into work and you've already corrected your attitude to this person, if you happen to

bump into them in the corridor, you'll see that quite spontaneously you'll smile because you've got that goodwill. And that disarms the person who feels rotten about you, even if they have every right to do so.

It's also with your work. I don't think there's any work, even if it's the work you've always wanted to do, where you don't go through periods of boredom, periods of disillusion with it, periods of feeling not in control of it, the fear of losing it. I mean, all those things will come whether we're doing the exact work we've always wanted to do or not.

If every morning we just reflect on that and we contact those feelings that we have about work, and then just re-establish a right intention, very slowly they're undermined.

So, the ability to contact those sorts of feelings is the gift of *vipassanā*. The ability to turn those feelings around is the gift of *metta*. And if you don't do the one without the other, then mistakes are made.

If you do the *vipassanā* without the *metta*, you can end up being calloused, indifferent, confusing indifference with equanimity. If you do the *metta* without the *vipassanā*, without you knowing it, you can be layering all this horrible stuff with a bit of icing. And you think everything's going fine until somebody does something and suddenly all these guns burst out and they wonder what's wrong with you. Because you've nicely patted it down with all this luscious icing.

So it's the combination of the two which help us to find a relationship to our lives which actually brings about a certain peace about it, an acceptance.

Now, when we're sitting, that's another virtue that we are developing — the sense of acceptance. This is the way it is. Now, acceptance isn't resignation. If something happens to you which is awful, there's that sort of possibility of giving up, of resigning, of being destroyed by it even. But acceptance is more that realistic appraisal of what there is and accepting it with a heart.

Now, because we live in the motion of time, even if this time arises and passes away, at least there's a forward movement — you can't go back on it. That ability to accept always presents us with potential. Every moment has a potential. And that potential is manifested by our decision making.

If you're at the point where you've resigned yourself, where you feel depressed about something, even when somebody says, "Here's a great job," you can't do it. You're stuck. You're stuck in this pit that you've put yourself in. But if it's just an acceptance, no matter how painful it might be, if it's an acceptance of the way things are, then there's always that openness, there's always that ability to see where the potential lies.

So you can see what we're doing here by just opening up to ourselves all the stuff that comes up and just accepting it as it is, not wanting to do anything with it, just allowing it to be, is creating that sense of open acceptance of things, patience, forbearance. These are really important qualities in our lives, aren't they?

So these two first steps — the *vipassanā* or the right understanding and the *metta* — you have to sort of

put them together. The other thing that is this business of reflection that I ask you to do after every sit. So at the end of the day, just to reflect upon it, just to bring up incidents that have happened.

I was brought up a Catholic. It was called examination of conscience. And then you beat yourself up. But this business of reflecting, of thinking about one's life, that's part of the whole process of guiding ourselves. Without that reflection, you tend to be blind to the way you are. So if people don't turn up for your party, then you've got to ask yourself, "Well, I wonder why they're not..."

Without reflecting on your life and to do that at the end of every day, it just becomes a habit — your own little private blog for the computers of it.

So now once we've done that as a practice, we now move into an action. So this is right speech, right action and right livelihood.

When we talk about right speech and right action in the tradition, you always get the negative side — not to tell whoppers, not to slander people, not to go around killing things, things like that. But remember, all these have their opposites too. So instead of slandering people, to talk generously about people. Instead of telling whoppers, to be careful about exaggeration — who you're trying to impress — because when they find out, they're not very impressed at all.

Coarse speech — be careful of your language. And I think probably, maybe the worst of all, I don't know, is just useless speech. I mean, how often have you felt that you needed to talk today? You might have surprised yourself and felt that you didn't feel like speaking to anybody. But if you take an ordinary day, we're always chattering. Always going through reams of silly stuff — absolutely immaterial. And it's just chatter.

Now, you have to be careful here. I'm not suggesting that you do away with social pleasantries. Not to say good morning to somebody. But they say in the monastic life, like in the meditation center I was in, you never said good morning. You just glowered at each other. No, you didn't do any of that stuff at all, like good morning and how are you and all that. If you wanted to say something, you went up and you actually said what you wanted to say and that was it. So it just stops that sort of mind chatter.

It so quickly gets into whinging, doesn't it? And you get that special sound with whinging, don't you? It goes with the whinge. And just to catch that in the voice — "Here I go again." So there's your awareness, recognizing that it's a waste of energy just doing that sort of stuff. It doesn't produce any good stuff.

Now when we get to right action, again it's all put in the negative — not to kill, not to steal and all that. But the opposite of that of course is to cherish life, isn't it? Is to take care of life, to be generous with one's wealth and time, instead of always trying to sneak a minute off work early, things like that.

And that whole business around our sexuality and our relationship to people at that level, if you're fortunate to have it. Just to be aware that that's energy and that's all — there's also lots of attachment

there. If you happen to end up being a celibate, I like to quote Churchill on this: "There are those who are born celibate, there are those who achieve celibacy, and there are those who have celibacy thrust upon them."

So if you find yourself thrust upon into celibacy, then take it as an occasion to let go of that side of your nature, to let it go. Celibacy is a little bit misunderstood because it's presumed that it's only to do with sexuality. It's only to do with our erotic nature. But it's not. It's to do, at a much deeper level, it's to do with not seeking happiness in another person. Recognizing that there's nobody in the world that's going to make you happy. Not in any real sense. They might make you happy for a little while. But if your happiness is dependent on that person, then, of course, you may be in for a lot of suffering. They may end up leaving you, hating you. They'll die on you, for God's sake.

So celibacy is really that recognition. And that doesn't stop — once you understand that, it doesn't stop you having a proper relationship with people and it shouldn't stop you having even a romantic or an erotic relationship with somebody. It's just that you know that there's a danger there of seeking happiness, so there's the attachment.

So if you find yourself in periods of celibacy, use it to just let go of those dreams, those fantasies that surround it. And recognize that it's not a need. It's not like food. It's not like sleep. Unfortunately these days we're so saturated with sex that it's become a need. But that's just the advertising.

The next step is this right livelihood. And again, it's always put in a sort of negative sense — not to get into trafficking people, prostitution. It's all on the heavy side. And really if you think about it, our work ideally ought to be an expression of our talents for the benefit of others in society. That's what it ought to be. But it's very rare that we find people who've ended up doing exactly what they want to do, who've had their talents truly developed through their work.

Now, you can get very negative about that, you can get very negative about your work because you've ended up in something that you don't particularly want to do. So now, if you end up just being negative, you just become soured. But if you again accept the situation, then there's always that creativity around it, there's always a possibility.

One little experience I had when I was a schoolboy and used to go for these jobs during the holiday. I ended up in one of these cake factories. Christmas it was too. And they had this machine, a really old 19th century thing. And it used to whizz these cakes around on a belt. And they had a line of all these women all doing something to this cake. And I was at the end of this line. My job was to put the cherry on top. It was most unfortunate. And of course I kept missing. It was a skill. You had to be there with the cake. It came like that. And they were very kind — "Oh, you're only a little boring, I'm giving you a little time." And after a while it got really boring. I mean, talk about boredom. I mean, just picking up a cherry and sticking it on a cake for hours on end. Really, really boring.

And in those days, of course, I really just found that very difficult. And luckily they kept moving me around doing this and that because I tended to be useless at it — all this cake making stuff. But of course now, if I ended up in something like that, for me that would become a concentration exercise, at least I hope so. That would become a moment — moment — absolute Zen type precision of that cherry landing spot on the middle of that cake.

Did you like... You know, Zen and the art of archery — have you read that book? Well, there's an amazing bit at the end. I mean, you have to believe it because he was there. I mean, why should he tell lies? But in the dark, the master fires an arrow at the target. In the dark. And then he fires again another arrow. When they look, the second arrow pierced through the first arrow, which is spot on bullseye.

So there's me with this cherry. I mean... So it really doesn't matter what you end up doing. It's your attitude to it.

I mean, even in monastic life, a lot of this stuff, like sweeping, you do sweeping every day. The same courtyard, different leaves — sweeping, sweeping, sweeping. That's all you do for one hour a day. And when you finally stop balking against it, and you recognize that A, this has to be done, and then you see it as a concentration exercise, or even as an insight exercise, then it takes on a life of its own.

I used to go — have you been to the Throssel Hole Abbey? Oh, that way. Yeah, well, I used to go up there in the early days. And we used to work these long hours, three hours. And the whole idea of it was to be completely centered on what you were doing. So there was no future. There was just this. There was just the weeding. You pulled out the weed. And it was quite remarkable how the body would get into a sort of dance just pulling out weeds. It would just begin to become balletic pulling out weeds and you are completely wrapped up in these damn weeds.

So it doesn't matter what we do, but our attitude to the way we're doing it.

Now this business of right livelihood — I read a very good book on it. I've been trying to remember the name of it and it failed again. And it would be good actually if we stretched that out a little bit to right lifestyle. To look at the whole of your life as a lifestyle. What decisions are you making about how you eat, when you eat, when you go to bed — two hours before midnight and all that. And to see the whole of your working life, from the moment you get up to the moment you sleep, as a way of living.

Now, what the spiritual life demands is that it all has to make sense to the center. You can't do things which don't make sense to your spiritual life anymore. It's a dissipation of energy — it takes you away from it.

So even for instance, coming home — what's your lifestyle when you come home? What do you do? You just flop in a chair and turn the TV on. So ask yourself, "Why should I be doing that?" Ask yourself what programs you ought to be watching, because remember, every time you attend to something, it's an act of intention. An act of intention is a conditioning — it's a conditioning within us. When you stand there and

you're saying, "Intending to walk," you walk — the leg moves. It's an intention. So everything starts with an intention.

So if you put your attention on a program which is, say, a waste of time or which is creating some sort of bad feelings within you about something — most programs are just a waste of time, aren't they? And it's just that — it's just another case of wasted talk, wasted energy. And ask yourself, "Should I be putting this into my system?"

And it's that sort of question where your life, as it were, becomes centered. Now, the more it becomes centered, the more meaningful it becomes. If you're doing things which don't have meaning to this center, to your own spiritual understanding, then there's that feeling of uselessness.

One of the great despairs of the modern age, isn't it, is that people are so enwrapped with the pleasures of life, because it's there at a switch, isn't it, that it becomes this emptiness. They're constantly going to parties, "What's the next thing to do? Where are you going on holiday? What's the next thing to buy?" Going into shops, and they're living on that sort of very ephemeral, superficial plane of immediate gratification. And when it's not there, where do they go? They just drop into boredom. And when they get into boredom, what's there? It's despair.

And that despair is a very horrible place to be, so they zoom up and try and get another fix. Doesn't matter what it is. And that's the psychology of pleasure. Unfortunately, Freud understood the problems of his own age, the problems of suppression, of repressing things. But we still haven't understood the problems of indulgence.

Now, that's where you begin to look at your life and you think, well, why am I indulging in that? Where is it taking me? Why am I watching so much television? Should I be doing something else? Why am I always searching for friendship? Should I be more on my own? Why am I reading that?

Like, for instance, today, just out of habit, I walked into the station. I picked up the Metro, that newspaper. And I'm reading through it and I'm thinking, what am I doing this for? It's a lot of rubbish. A lot of rubbish. And I thought I had to put it away. And it's that sort of reflection about these things that we often do just out of habit and to question everything we do so that we start gearing the whole of our lifestyle in the right way. And then the gift of that is this great meaningfulness about our life. It really takes on a real profound meaning for us.

Yeah, this is a question that often comes up. People often say, well, that sort of stuff is easy for monks. It's difficult for lay people. Well, ideally, it is easy for monks. That's the whole idea of an institution. That's what the Buddha set up. He set up this institution to make it easy. He said, leave all that. He said, don't, you know, just get out of all that. Find yourself a little hut out there in a forest and just go for it.

So the problem with lay life, the problem with living in society, especially in this one, is that everybody around you is doing exactly the opposite. I mean, if we were living in a more homogenous society, say like

some of these Muslim societies, where if you said, well, I'm going to pray five times a day, they'd all say, fine, they might join in. If you said, well, I'm just going to meditate now half an hour at work, they'd be a nutter. And that's it. In this society, you're right up against the grain of it. Very few people really, you know, they just haven't got it. So, of course, it's very difficult. Very difficult.

But that doesn't mean to say that we can't keep working at it. And also, you know, where there's a difficulty, there is that extra effort. And when you make that extra effort, you do get that extra comeback. It's just like when you sit in meditation. If you can just hang on in there through the restlessness or through the anxiety, then you get that benefit.

So, again, it's a case of being in a situation where you feel it's against your spiritual life, it's actually something the people around you aren't working with you, not to find yourself being aggressive, not to find yourself being in a state of contradiction with them, but finding a way in which you can work with that so that you feel you're still gently progressing. It's very important, that is. And eventually I think you find that people begin to respect you for it actually.

So then there's finally on the Eightfold Path you've got the three which are to do with meditation. So it's right concentration, right effort and right mindfulness. When we're sitting, we have to see that as a training. That isn't an end in itself. That is a place where we are developing this right effort. We're developing a certain type of mindfulness. It's a mindfulness which is geared to seeing these three characteristics. That doesn't negate other types of mindfulness. You want to be mindful of adding up your bills for a start.

Yeah it's not easy but there is this other angle to our awareness, to something within us which has an inkling—there's an inkling there within us that there may be something better than this. So you wouldn't be here if that inkling wasn't there. You wouldn't be going through this misery a whole day of it if you didn't know that—if there wasn't something in you which was suggesting that there was something other than what we're actually experiencing.

Now, what we're doing in this meditation, remember, is separating out this very bright intelligence. This intelligence confuses itself with apparition. It confuses itself with intellect. It confuses itself with words, with stories, with images, with films, inner films. It confuses itself with emotions and how emotions express themselves in art. It confuses itself with the body and the intelligence of the body. You know, these sports people, tremendous physical intelligence, you know, these gymnasts, I can't believe it.

And those three, when we see intelligence expressing itself through that, we think that's what intelligence is. But it's not you see. What we're discovering is this other place, this knowing that is within us which is very bright, very clear and is able to distance itself from all these apparitions that we call ourselves.

It's recognizing that place, how important that place is, and being able to re-establish it throughout the day which is the trick to slowly progressing in our daily lives and not feeling that we're not getting anywhere.

Even when you do this practice well you still get the feeling of not going anywhere, but that's because of expectation that there's going to be some sort of huge leap and I'm going to wake up a completely different animal.

But unfortunately it very rarely happens like that. It's a very slow progress. I mean the Buddha warns us that. He says it's very gradual. We can expect some great change over a period of 25 years if we work at it, a long term project.

So one thing that we can do when we return home is just to write to yourself. Write a little letter to yourself about how you think you ought to spend the next year. Make small resolutions that you know you can keep. Don't make these big ones. For instance, if you don't have a habit of sitting in the morning, you know, don't say to yourself, well, from now on, it's one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. You know, it lasts a day. And then you get fed up with yourself. But if you say to yourself something that you can really handle, like 10 minutes, heavens, you can spare 10 minutes of a morning and 10 minutes of an evening. And then very slowly the effect of that, and just this constant, this constant recollection throughout the day of coming back to that point of being aware.

Even now, just to be aware right now. Now that awareness can be single, can be one-pointed, you could just be listening to my words, it can be spacious, you can be aware of what's happening in your body, you can be aware of your feet on the ground and still be aware of the words. The object of awareness is not the awareness itself. Sometimes you have to be very single, you know, you have to be right there with what you're doing, like when you're crossing a road or something in busy traffic. And at other times it can be quite spacious. So the situation demands it. But don't confuse the object of awareness with the faculty of the knowing.

And it's that separation which brings us constantly back to this amazing thing that we have, you know, this pure intelligence. And remember that it's within that intelligence that the kink lies. That's where the delusion lies. It doesn't lie outside itself. If it was out there, you could quickly see it. We could probably very quickly become awakened. But it's within the beholding that the problem lies. And that's why we have to keep working at it.

Even when we begin to have insights, we begin to see, oh yes, everything's arising and passing. I can see how I cause all my own suffering. Remember in Buddhism, nobody can cause you psychological pain. If you can't, you've got to get to that point where you realize that. But that doesn't mean to say there isn't going to be any, because there's all this backlog that you've got to work through. And that's all this stuff that keeps coming up throughout the day.

So it's again this ability to stay with it, to be patient, to constantly reestablish ourselves in that position of the observation post. And as I say, this isn't a big effort. This isn't like you're climbing a mountain. This is a lot to do with just self-cajoling, with just talking to yourself in a right way, with persuading yourself to be there, not to get caught up in that. Come back, you know.

So if we just sit quietly for a moment and just let thoughts arise and pass away.

So I suppose the main thing I was trying to get across was the importance of reflection. It's just part of thinking about the way we're living, making the right decisions. Not just keep going on blindly.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance and I can only wish from the depth of my heart that you become fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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