Roads to Power: The 37 Bodhipakkhiya Dhammā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 41:34

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

I thought I'd go through the *Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma*. You've all heard of those, I'm sure. There are 37 of them, for heaven's sake. I remember years ago, there was a very good Canadian scholar called Warder. His introduction to Pali is still considered the best, if you want to study a bit of Pali. And what he was saying was that these 37 *bodhipakkhiya dhamma* encapsulate the whole of the Buddha's teachings. And since then, of course, Rupert Gethin has written a big book on this.

And these *bodhipakkhiya dhamma* are found in the other recension of the scriptures by the Sarvāstivādin school. So there are two schools for which we still have the scriptures. The one is this Theravāda school and the other one is the Sarvāstivādin school, which is only in Chinese. And they both come from the same period, within something like 100 years of the Buddha's death, Parinibbāna. So these 37 encapsulate the fullness of his teachings.

Obviously he didn't start off like this. This was something that developed as he went around teaching. You can see that development in the early scriptures. You get five links to the dependent origination and then it finally ends up with 12. So it's not as though he rose from the seat and knew exactly how to get it across. That was also a learning process for him.

And remember when he actually meets his five companions, he begins to explain this. At first they didn't want to meet him because they thought he'd gone soft. He'd given up the heavy self-mortification life. And when they finally greet him and they feel that something changed about the man, he begins to teach. And one of the questions he asks is, have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say this sort of thing before? And so very slowly, of course, they begin to realise that he'd made some sort of big breakthrough.

So what are these 37? I think you'll know them all. There's one or two that you might not have come across. The first one is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. So that's the discourse on the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, called the *Satipaṭṭhāna* Discourse. And that's the one, remember, he gave to lay people. So he did a lot of travelling on the Gangetic plane there and he ended up at a place called Kuru Sadhamma. And at this place he was taken on his second visit or third visit, who knows, he was taken by the way the people

actually were practising, like us. And so he gave them this special teaching.

And so it opens up with that. This talk was given to the people of Kuru Sadhamma, the Kurus of Kuru Sadhamma. So we can take this as a teaching which was specific to the lay situation. Pure *vipassanā*. Remember the other form is with concentration. If you're good at concentration, do it. But if you're not, pure *vipassanā* will get you there.

So remember there are four of these establishments where you place your attention to investigate. So the first one is the body. That, remember, has both a coarse and obvious meaning, but also has a subtle meaning. So it's the body as we know it, as we experience it, doing all its things, eating, sweating and so on. I won't go into details. And there's the more subtle body that we experience through the mind in terms of the four great elements.

So when we're experiencing weight, pressure, that sort of thing, that's called the earth element. If we're experiencing heat and the wonderful warmth of this room... Are you all warm, by the way? Yeah. Then that's the fire element. Something elastic, something that congeals, that's the water element. And then finally movement is your air element. So when you're actually experiencing that, right at the base where the senses actually touch matter, you're experiencing the body at a more subtle level.

And it is subtle. I saw this program on smelling. Smelling takes place at a subatomic level, would you believe? Absolutely amazing. It's not even a chemical level. We think it's a chemical, but it's not. It's at a subatomic level. I can't go into details, of course, only because I have no time. It's the same with the eye, of course. When you think about it, we're actually experiencing light at that subatomic level. These tiny infinitesimal photons. Anyway, that's the body.

Then there's the whole section on feeling. So remember, he always describes feeling in these two ways. Physical feeling and mental feeling. Pleasant, unpleasant. And an area in between that he calls neutral. So when we talk of emotions, there's no real word for emotions. I don't think so anyway. I think it's more to do with recognising that there's a feeling in the body that we recognise as a mental feeling. I mean, some are pretty obvious, like anger and anxiety. So that would be a feeling in the body. What happens with the mind and all that is another category.

And that's your mental states. That includes all your thinking and your lack of it. *Citta*. The next one, the *ci tta* is more to do with your mental states, your total mental states. And the fourth category is the *dhamma*, which actually refers to investigating all these three from certain points of view. So when something unwholesome comes up, then we look at them from the point of view of the hindrances.

When we look at the body and the congregation of factors that make up a human being, we look at these aggregates. The aggregates, the physical aggregates, the feeling aggregates, perception aggregates, and so on. So those are ways. Factors of enlightenment, they're the same. And even the Four Noble Truths, you can look at your experience through the Four Noble Truths. This is suffering and so on.

So that's the whole section. There's four of them, remember. I'm adding up to 37, remember. Those are your four where you establish all the foundation of your practice. And we'll come to this. There's three words that are repeated continuously throughout the discourse. *Ātāpī, sampajāno, satimatā*. *Ātāpī* is real energy, real commitment. It is connected to the word *tapaḥ*, which is mortification exercise. A real commitment. And *sampajāna* is your intuitive faculty, that which grasps and understands. *Sati* is your awareness.

These two, so this place, Satipañña, the word comes from the teachings of Buddhadāsa, who was a very famous teacher in South Thailand. And he used to use this combination, Satipañña, because that's pretty straightforward. So it's your intuitive awareness. They're not two faculties, they're two sides of the same coin. So we say it in English, for instance, first you look and then you see. So it's that sort of, it's the grasping or the understanding comes upon the looking.

So when we're sitting, we're observing, we're observing, we're letting things arise and we're observing them. And every so often we have a little insight. That's the way it works. You can't make that happen. See, if you try to make it happen, then you'll probably distort what you're looking at. So if you say to yourself, oh, that's impermanence. Well, you might have seen impermanence, but you're distorting it by thinking about it. It's more a grasping of it, an actual experience that something has arisen and passed away.

That's not mystical or magical. You just know that the breath has come to an end and there's a stop. It's finished. Then the next breath comes. So you're constantly aware of the beginning and ending of things. That's the radical impermanence that we live with.

So those are your four, we can go over this later, but those are your four establishments or sometimes called foundations of mindfulness, awareness. Then you've got the four right exertions. So these are pretty straightforward too. So preventing an unskillful state to arise. Abandoning what's already arisen which is unskillful. And the arising of skillful states and how to sustain and increase them.

Prevent unskillful states arising. Abandon those that have arisen. And then to make skillful states arise. That's an exertion. To actually make it happen. And to sustain and increase those skillful states.

So just in ordinary daily life, when we see an unskillful state arise in our minds, some sort of anger, some anxiety or whatever, then you actually recognise it's there. And you don't let the mind wander on it, develop it. That's the second exertion. And then you train yourself to be quicker on the mark so that you don't get caught up in it. And then there's ways in which you can undermine certain things by balancing it with its opposite.

So, for instance, if a person has a problem with eating, to balance it with the process of digestion and excretion. So as soon as the idea of food comes up, the idea of going to the toilet comes up. And it has the effect of stopping that. It's the same with lust. If a person has a problem with lust, by actually looking at the disgusting nature of the body, that which disgusts us, then as soon as that comes up, you get this

cancelling. Now, there's a danger here that you go too far on the disgusting side and you can't enjoy anything. So you have to be skillful with this one. These are exercises given to monastics. Not that they practise them.

So I mean, just averting your eyes is sometimes a way of preventing you from, for instance, if all the bad news that we get is just getting you down all the time, don't listen to it. Don't look at the TV. It doesn't mean to say that you cancel out your compassion. It's just that you don't want to get burned out. You don't want to be upset by it all.

On the other hand, you might use it in order to increase, to hear news or to read articles that are painful to read and to bear that pain with it. So that one becomes more empathic. Empathetic. Empathic. Is that right? Empathy. Yes, empathic.

And this constant effort to make skillful states arise. I mean, that's really our practise in daily life. In the morning, when I say, make a resolution for the day. See, put a resolution in your mind for the day. It might be a regular one that you do every day, but certain days might want something other than your regular.

So the basic one is to live with an awareness imbued with loving-kindness. That's the Buddha's phrase. Affectionate awareness. So you're bringing not only a sense of awareness to what you're doing, but also a certain kindliness. And depending on the situation, it can be compassion, a desire to help, not to be confused with pity. Joy, to actually respond to another person's joy with joyfulness. And to be joyful in ourselves, for heaven's sake, don't forget, we also have to be joyful.

So we can make these resolutions and practise it during the day. And of course what we're doing is we are reconditioning ourselves. So the Buddha, remember the Buddha was not liberated from conditioning as a human being. He just wasn't overwhelmed by it. He just wasn't caught up in it. But the body said hunger, so he went out for food. And when somebody asked him a question, he would respond to that question. So it's not as though what we're moving towards is some sort of completely unconditional life here as a human being. That's impossible. Everything's conditioned.

So the unconditioned is referring to a relationship we have with the life we're leading. And that's what we call that unshackling. That's the word *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* means to unshackle. Sometimes it's given other meanings, but that seems to be its root meaning. *Nirvāṇa*. It means unshackled, unchained. And what is it that's unchained, unshackled? It's your awareness. Every time your awareness falls into some sort of identity or possession of something, then suffering is bound to rise. Some sort of unsatisfactoriness arises. Being able to keep that gentle distance.

And yet within that distance not to lose the connection of empathy, compassion and love. And joy. Don't forget joy.

So those are our four exertions. And that's a daily task. I mean that's an ongoing task. You don't stop that.

You don't take a holiday from that. You can't take a holiday. Not in this game.

I'll leave the four bases of magical power. We'll come to that in a minute. That's the special teaching for this. Let's just get into the five spiritual faculties. And these of course lock into the seven factors of enlightenment. So the Buddha here is talking about really those basic faculties that you need to progress.

Faith, a sense of trust. Remember this English word belief also means to have faith in something without question. It has that sort of meaning. But here the *saddhā* is not about that sort of thing. It's about trust, conviction. Even conviction is not quite right. It's got here conviction. Trust. You can't do anything without trust, can you? I mean, if you go on a high diving board and if you don't trust yourself to do it, you won't do it, will you? You won't have the confidence. It's a confidence, putting your faith in something. You won't do anything. You won't go anywhere with a friend unless you are confident that they are your friend and so on. So that sort of trust is the base. Without that, you just don't move. And when you don't have that, you suffer from sceptical doubt. And sceptical doubt is based on fear. Fear of what? Fear of failure, for instance. And that can be a real barrier to our lives. It can really mess you up. Because every time you're about to do something, then you have this doubt about yourself. Or doubt about the other. So you never move.

With that, there comes this energy. Once you've got that conviction, once you've got that confidence, then you empower it. You put your energy into what you want to do. And that supports your concentration, which is the third one. So it supports your steadiness of attention. And then there's the mindfulness, of course. Just being mindful. Being aware of what we're doing. It's as simple as that, basically. Being aware of what we're doing.

And that includes the ethical level. It's no good being aware of killing somebody or stabbing somebody to death. I mean, that's not... I mean, you are aware, but it isn't quite the right awareness which is going to get us liberated. So there's always underlying all these things, this basic ethic about no harm. That's your fundamental one. No harm. Sometimes you can't avoid harm. If you're a farmer, for instance, you can't. So you have to accept there's certain limitations to them. But at least you don't do it with cruelty in the heart. That's the difference.

So that concentration and energy go together. And then there's the wisdom, which is here, just a way of looking at things. Basically, remember, that's always referring back to these three characteristics of existence. Just to be constantly reminding ourselves. It doesn't have to become obsessional, but just noticing that things come to an end. Every time we fall into this wrong relationship of identifying, it's me, it's mine, mine, mine, you get into some sort of unsatisfaction. And this sense of not-self, you can see it from the point of view of control.

So remember, our control is minimal. I mean, when you're driving a car, there are times when you are locked into the driving and you have the impression, you have the feeling that you are in control of the car. And of course you are in terms of where it's going and all that. But as you know, the car can suddenly

stop for no reason. And that's it. Then you realise you aren't in control. You are not in control of the car in that absolute sense. So it's the same with the body. We can wave our arms about and speak and all that sort of stuff, but ultimately the body itself is not under our direct control. So the question is, if it's not under your control, how can it be you?

So one of the definitions of 'me' is that I am the centre of control. And the other one is through your meditation to begin to objectify things, to see everything as an object. The perceiver can't be the perceived.

And this takes you right back to that primal state of being the observer. Now that sense of self is not the sense of self that you get when you're proud or when you're embarrassed. That's something else. But that cool sort of sense of the observer within yourself. Remember, that's the first object you make. And that's the image on that screen of consciousness which draws you into the world of the mind.

So when you come out and you're seeing, you're seeing images up here and you're feeling your knee down there and your heart's exploding with wonderful joy. All that, you see, remember, because you're the observer, you stepped out of it. You stepped out of it, you become an observer. So that's a magical moment, that is. And it's making that more and more clear to ourselves. That takes us back into this observer, the feeler. So, and then of course you can explore that. There must be something there that knows, eh? Correct?

Note vigorously please. Oh God, I'm falling asleep.

Now to do with that are the seven factors of enlightenment. So mindfulness of course. We've got the energy, you see. We've got the concentration. That's there, you see. We've got this - it's badly translated as joy, right? The best translation is interest. It's a real interest. It's a driving curiosity. We'll come to that later. You've got to be really interested in what you're investigating. And that's the joy of the practice, yeah? Tranquillity, calmness.

And then there's that sense of investigation. So that's the question mark in the mind. If the question mark's not there in your mind, that's not *vipassanā*. You're doing some concentration exercise or whatever. So there has to be that sense of curiosity. Yeah?

And finally, this quality of equanimity, which some write... Well, Ñāṇaponika, the German monk, wrote 'The Heart of Buddhist Meditation'. Still an absolute classic. Always worth a read. So he points out, he thinks that, or he says, in so many words, that equanimity is the greatest of all virtues. Keeps the balance, you see. Keeps us balanced.

In these seven factors, you don't get love. You don't get compassion. It's interesting, isn't it? Yeah, you see. The presumption is that it's always there. I mean, you wouldn't be doing it were it not that you had a sense of care for yourself. And a sense of understanding that it has an outward flow. You know, that when... As you purify the heart, remember that part of the meditation is purifying the heart. When you're allowing these hindrances to come up - you know, the greed, the hatred, all that sort of stuff - when you're allowing

that to come up you see as mental states, that's purification, that is. It's just blowing out. So that's the effort of purification and it's there within the practice. There's your compassion towards yourself. It doesn't have to be stated.

And then there's the... so you've got those seven, yeah? Mindfulness, the sense of investigation, the energy, the commitment, that sense of joy, the tranquillity, the concentration, equanimity.

Now, how can you establish these when the mind is in a complete furore? You know, when it's going berserk or when you're actually falling asleep. Where are the seven factors then, you see?

So this is what we have to understand. In the awareness itself, you get those seven factors. So you've got your five *khandhās*, you see, and normally speaking, we're locked into it and getting all confused by it. So in our meditation, we come out. So this is the inner 'I', yeah? And you've got the five *khandhās* here. All those faculties come back into the awareness.

The awareness has its equanimity. The awareness is calm. The awareness has that sense of question, you see? You're drawing yourself out to this point of observation. When you actually begin, you might feel them as something that you can experience within the body. Tranquillity, calmness. But don't think that because now you don't feel calm, the quality of tranquillity isn't there. It's there within the awareness. So that's always the effort to pull ourselves out and observe, you see.

And then finally there's the Noble Eightfold Path. So this is an outward flow. So from right understanding you get a right intention. I always think the better word is attitude. Right attitude. And an attitude is a way of relating. A way of relating. Now this right understanding is translating itself into an ethic. And then from that you get the right speech, right action and right livelihood.

It's interesting that he should make a big thing of livelihood because you could put it all in action. The action is normally described as the moral laws. Normally it's negative - what you shouldn't do, not kill and all that - but you can also add in there what we ought to be doing. But livelihood, remember, is... It's very conditioning. I mean, what we do for a great deal of our lives, for eight hours a day, has to have an effect on our characters and on the way we relate to the world. I mean, just compare a nurse to a policeman, or a soldier.

Now, there are virtues in being a soldier. We tend to be, liberals tend to be negative about soldiering. But soldiering has its qualities of courage and all that sort of stuff. St. George, our patron saint. So, right livelihood is put there, recognising that it is a real conditioning factor in our lives.

And then, at the end of that, you've got the energy, the commitment, the mindfulness, and finally the concentration. Normally you get it divided as *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So *sīla* is your morality. *Samādhi* is your concentration, ability for your... just the steadiness of attention. We're not talking about big heavy *jhā nas* here. And the mindfulness is your awareness, which has included in it this sense of grasping, this intuitive faculty.

Now you can see how this revolves around itself because if we develop a right attitude, that's got to feed back into our understanding. So the more that we develop a right attitude, shall we say, to all these refugees, see, some people feel very negative about them, but if they develop a right attitude, then you get the wisdom, which is, of course, that we're all human beings and we're all suffering to one level or another. Things like that.

So with that right attitude, developing right attitude has an effect on the way that we understand life. And just being, just the way we speak, you know, taking, being careful about what we say, the four things, you know, kindly speech, truthful speech, speech at the right time, suitable time. So, you know, practising that has an effect on our understanding about relationship, about how we relate to each other. So that's the Noble Eightfold Path.

So I just want to go back now to the four bases of magical power. Where's my magical powers? Here we are.

So there are five magical powers, none of which very few people believe in in our society. They just think it's a bit of a joke, really. So the Buddha says that somebody who practises these wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one, he becomes many, and having been many, he becomes one. Appearing or vanishing. He appears unobstructed through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if on dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird.

Now how many of you are going to believe that? You see, we are deeply sceptical of these things. Deeply sceptical. Reminds me of, oh dear, I've forgotten her name. Dīpamā. Yes, Dīpamā, thank you. Thank you, Trevor. If you read the book on Dīpamā, who was this Indian lady, she was able to do this. I'll give you a few examples afterwards.

Then there's the divine ear to see things which are really beyond the normal range of things. Then there's the awareness of other beings, other individuals. Sorry, that's a bad translation. To be able to read other people's minds.

Have I told you the story of this Jungian psychotherapist? You haven't heard my story, right? Well, I was in the Isle of Man. And we used to go to, when I went over there, a couple of times we were taken, I went over with Pam and, I can't remember, what was the name of the other elderly lady? We used to go over to listen to talks given by this Jungian. Paddy and Pam, wasn't it? Yeah, that's it, Paddy.

So she took me over to listen to the talks given by this Jungian therapist. He was already retired. But after he'd given this talk, he said to me that he'd been to Burma because he'd become very interested in Buddhism, in the teaching of Buddhism. And when he got to Rangoon, he asked, where should he go to really learn about Buddhism? They said, well, you should go to the teaching monasteries up in Mandalay, the big university monasteries.

So he was given an interpreter. And he went up to talk to this very elderly monk. And he said he just sat in a chair surrounded by books. This elderly monk. And they discussed the Dharma for two hours. Thereabouts. And it was only when he was leaving that he realised he hadn't used the interpreter. And there was still that sense of shock on his face when he told me. Figure that out. I won't say any more.

Recollect past lives. People do recollect past lives. Even people who come here. A past life recollection, the telltale is that when that memory comes up, you are a different person. It's not as though you have a conversation, well, you know, I was Napoleon in my past life. And the person you're talking to said, so was I.

There's a lot of research done by Stevenson, so you can read about it. And I've got a video there about this little American boy. Has a tremendous past life experience recall as a pilot downed in the Pacific during the Japanese-American war there, Second World War. And, you know, he goes to see the sister of this particular pilot and they have a conversation. The sister says he knows things about the family that only we know. This guy lives somewhere else.

You also get extraordinary powers which are very hard to explain. There was a programme, I think, on this young girl, about 10 or 12 or something, and she's composed an opera which is being performed in Austria, and she's there directing the orchestra, telling the conductor what to do and what not to do. Somebody told me about it. I saw a little clip about her. I said, how do you explain that? I shall leave that to the scientists. So, past lives.

Divine eye. You can see things that... The divine eye is often also seeing a person as they really are. Remember, you sometimes get in Buddhism, you hear people saying when two people meet, there are six people there. There's you as I see you, and there's you as you see you, and there's you as you really are. And the same applies to me. So how we communicate is a wonder.

And the final one is the spiritual one. The fact that all the mental defilements are completely destroyed. And then one is known to be released from suffering.

Now, the reason I've pulled this up is that the Buddha talks... I mean, that's in the scriptures, all this is in the scriptures. But when we look at the actual faculties, they are, of course, something we have to take into daily life. And being the new year, these give us some idea of those qualities we need to really develop. I believe in Thailand, these, you know, they'll talk about the *iddhi*, these powers. Just in ordinary discourse, like, you know, if you want somebody to do better, they'll say, well, you know, practise these *iddhis*.

So the first one is *chanda*, which translates as sort of desire, but it's a very, very strong desire. Can you think of some time in your life when you really, really, really wanted something? That's the sort of desire you need to become liberated. So you really, really want it.

And then once you've... What that does is empower you to put tremendous energy behind that desire for success. When we say success here, you've got to be careful. You're aiming at something which you think

is worthwhile in your life. Right? Now, in the meditation, of course, we don't aim to get *nibbāna*. What we aim is purity of heart and insight into the faculties. The rest happens of itself. But without that real strong commitment, you see.

And the third one is a total application of the mind. Here, *citta* means both mind and heart. It's not just thinking, for heaven's sake. It's just the whole being is devoted to what you're doing.

And to maintain a sense of discrimination. To maintain always that sense of questioning what you're doing. There's always that reflection about what we're doing.

So if you think of those four things now. So you really want something. Yeah, ice cream. You really want something. And then you put your energy behind it. Real energy. Commitment. No holds barred. And with that energy, you're putting the whole of your mental powers into what you're doing. But you maintain always that sense of self-examination, self-reflection, reflecting what you're doing.

Now, when we, according to the Buddha, when we exercise those four things, you will achieve something of what you've aimed out to do. So that's your... Those are your *iddhis*, those are your power, your four bases of power. Sometimes it's just put as the four bases of power. So power is what you can achieve. Influence is what you can get other people to do for you. But power is what you can achieve.

When you for instance want to do something, if you get confused between the edge of your power and the edges of influence then that's where your frustration... that's where your frustration arises. So you're not reflecting and saying well I can't do that or I can do it, see. A lot of that is experimentation as to what you can do, what you can't do.

So take these people who are very much involved in compassionate work, you know. During the bombing of one of those cities in Syria, they interviewed a British doctor who'd gone out there, you see. And... Terrible. What he was saying was pretty awful. You know, one was... There was a little boy who was just screaming all the time. And the rest of his family, six children, mother and father, had been blown to bits. And he was the only one left. And he would stand there and just scream and then go still and then scream again. And...

And he was telling these things and he says, you know, you just do what you can do. And that's, he knows the limit of his power. If he tries to do what he can't do, then you're in a burnout. So there's that sort of reflection in our lives about what we can do and can't do. Yeah?

So you get somebody like Mo Farah, you see? Didn't he get the personality of the... Finally, you see? Finally. So that guy's training 135 miles a week. He's running 135... Every day he runs. And on Sunday, he runs a special sort of marathon. No matter what. Something like five miles an hour.

So now, can you... You know, this is a reflection that you can bring up tomorrow when we... Do a little bit of reflection about our lives. Have you ever been so engaged in your life in anything? Have you ever been

so engaged that it's drawn every last ounce of your commitment to it, you see?

Now, you can see that this is not only important in what we do, in anything you want to achieve, but spiritually speaking, it's a must. Can't be half-hearted. So that's why I was bringing up these four magical paths.

And then of course, in the end of course, you might be able to walk through a wall. But you have to have special exercises for that. And I should think for a long time it really hurts. Yes, we're very sceptical unfortunately. We live in a sceptical age. Interestingly enough, we're not very sceptical about science itself. Very good.

So I can only hope that my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even further confusion. May you, by your commitment to the Holy Life, be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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