The Three Characteristics of Existence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 50:40

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

So, this evening, for some of you, just a recap, maybe an introduction to these three characteristics of existence. That's what they're called, three characteristics of existence. And the place to start really is with the Four Noble Truths, because that's where he delineates, that's where he starts to express his understanding.

And the operative word is *dukkha*, so we have to really get a hold of that word, *dukkha*. It just means hard to bear. If you were to translate it directly, it's hard to bear. It used to be translated as suffering. So when people were told that the Buddha's teaching was there is suffering and this is the cause of suffering, everybody thought it was very pessimistic.

In fact, the first book I read on Buddhism that I remember was one by Dr. Schweitzer, who was a humanist. Well, he's a Christian, but very late in life he trained as a doctor and went to work in Africa and he was known for his humanitarian work and he wrote this book which contrasted Christianity to Buddhism and he declared without a shadow of a doubt that Christianity was life affirmative and Buddhism was life negative, life negative. So I don't know how I overcame that prejudice but somehow I did.

And a lot of it goes back to these early translations. These days, the most common is unsatisfactoriness. And then in that first noble truth, he tells us why it's unsatisfactory. And he talks about *dukkha-dukkhatā* and *viparināma-dukkha* and *saṅkhāra-dukkha*. So it's the unsatisfactoriness of pain, suffering etc. It's the unsatisfactoriness that is caused through impermanence and it's the unsatisfactoriness caused by things being compounded, having no substance.

And when he then goes into the second noble truth, that the cause of this is this *taṇhā*, this attachment, is not just our attachment to pleasure, it's our attachment to these wrong views, that in fact things do have a certain permanency, that things are truly real, and have some substance.

I was with a friend of mine and we were talking about something and I happened to say, but the body's unreal. And his father who was standing next to him blurted out, yes it is! And that was it. He died within a few weeks of that. But it was such a punch in the air that the conversation came to an end. You couldn't go anywhere with that statement. So, of course, it depends what he meant by real, but definitely it has no ultimate reality.

So, these three characteristics are telling us where our delusions lie. Delusion, remember, the definition of delusion is you don't know where you're deluded. If you knew you were deluded, if you knew where you were deluded, you wouldn't be deluded. You might still suffer from the consequence of delusion, but you wouldn't actually realize that you were deluded, because that's the whole definition of being deluded.

And these three definitions, of course, are defining, trying to define delusion, or trying to counter-define what in those days they were arguing about was what is substantial, what is ultimate reality. And the Brahmins opted, or generally speaking, the word was the self, the *attā*. This *attā*, this self, became more and more refined as time came on. And eventually, both the Brahmins, Brahmanism, which we now call Hinduism, came to the same understanding as Buddhism, but that's another story as to how it was filched. We won't go into that.

Anyway, what the Buddha is saying is, if there is something substantial, if there is this self, and we would say in our language a spirit or a soul or something which is eternal, if there is that, how can we discover it? Or how can we find out what it is? And it's the process of negation, which is again the same as in Brahmanism. So it's not this, not that. So that process of looking at things and saying not this, not that, is part of the process of wakening up to the way things really are, what we might call reality.

So these three avenues of investigation are really trying to clarify for us what it is that can't be ultimate truth, that can't be, shall we say, a real soul or spirit or self. And the first one, he starts off with, in the Four Noble Truths, he starts off with the *dukkha-dukkhatā*. So it's the suffering of ordinary pain and the sorrows of life. And then the next one is this, the suffering caused by change, and the last one, the cause by insubstantiality.

But when it comes to the practice, it's always *anicca* which comes first, *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. And we chant that in the morning, *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*, *sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*, *sabbe dhammā anattā*. So all compounded things are impermanent, all compounded things are unsatisfactory, all things don't constitute anything substantial or a self.

So why is it that in our practice we actually start with the *anicca*, with the impermanence? So if you were to say to anybody in the street, everything changes, nothing is permanent in the universe, and this is the deep teaching of the Buddha, they'd look at you and say, yeah. I mean, it's not as though people are not aware of change. But it doesn't change their behaviour. It doesn't motivate them to look more deeply into their lives. They just accept it. Things change and sometimes it's for the better and sometimes it's for the worse. They don't go deeply into the problems that arise when we don't actually change our lives through the insight into impermanence.

So when we see something is impermanent, the natural thing is not to get attached to it. So immediately, every time you have something which you treasure, it might be a ring, it might be a precious vase or whatever it is, or it might be something of a deeper value, a relationship, something like your work that you treasure, it's good practice to say, well, this too will come to an end. This too will come to an end.

Now, you might think that would send you into a depression. Well, it might. But the point is to be ready for what is inevitably going to happen because all things come to an end. So seeing *anicca* as something which is impermanent is about forming a different relationship to the world. It's about really recognizing that whatever we have or possess is going to change. It's going to disappear at some point. It's not going to be there for us. So that's the first thing.

And because we see that when we attach to something and we don't see impermanence, then we also see that in fact this is the cause of suffering. So *anicca* there, this impermanence, guides us into seeing suffering from the angle of impermanence. So that's one way of looking at things.

And the way we undermine that is by constantly reminding ourselves that things arise and pass away. And the biggest arising and passing away, of course, is being born and then having to die. So the actual contemplation of death is really a very strong contemplation, which at first might seem a bit lugubrious. It might drive you into jumping off a bridge. But actually what it does is it puts your life into a certain balance.

Because recognizing that life comes to an end, because of our aim in life, which is to become liberated, it makes this present moment that much more precious. If you think that death's going to happen sometime in the vast future, then of course there's no sense of immediacy. There's no sense of *saṁvega*, that sense of urgency in our practice.

So by reminding ourselves that we are one breath away from death, we are one heartbeat away from death. It's not very far, is it? One heartbeat. Boom, boom. That's it. Finished. Gone. By reminding ourselves that we're on this knife edge, that life can end at any time, we begin to experience life as much more bright, much more alert, because we're actually making it, we actually try to make it more meaningful for ourselves. And that's, of course, where the spiritual practice comes in.

So really looking at impermanence in all its different facets, both in the sense that in the minutest moments, I mean, how long does a moment last? How long can you hold a moment? It's like, how long is it? Gone, isn't it? And yet the mind is able to create this continuity for us.

I mean, think about music. You only hear one note, but somehow we can hear the whole tune. Somehow we capture the whole tune as it's going along and think that we're actually hearing the whole piece. But actually it's only one note at a time. So there's the ability of the mind to contain some idea of continuity, without which you couldn't live in the world, for heaven's sake. You'd be waking up everywhere you were. So there has to be that quality of continuity in our ordinary lives. But we're fooled by it into thinking that's the way things are. That's the problem.

So even in the minute, even in the minuscule layer of each moment arising and passing away, we can begin to catch the insecurity of our lives. And it's living with that insecurity which sharpens the present moment. And then in the long term, that contemplation every so often, that the end of life is this full stop

at the end. And to know that that's going to come, that also puts a pressure on us to make sense of this present moment, not to waste it, not to get lazy.

Don't be lazy now and be remorseful afterwards, says the Buddha. And remember that I mentioned, I think, earlier in the week, Sunlun, this fierce Arahant, who when asked, why is it people don't become liberated as quick as him, he said, because they're lazy.

And we're lazy because we think that our lives are just going to carry on. I mean, what's the problem? In the East, where the idea of rebirth is very easy for people, it's just part and parcel of their culture, then you do get this laziness. When you ask them, are you working to become liberated? No, I'm building up my bank account of good deeds and virtue and all that. And I'll be there when the next Buddha comes. Like, when's that? And of course, when the next Buddha comes, they'll be there still getting in their virtue and building up their good deeds. So sometimes to believe that life goes on in this rebirthing process really makes a person lazy.

So to bring about this sense of urgency that the Buddha talks about, that recollection of death is a very strong practice. And it's right there in the discourse on how to establish right awareness. I mean, there he describes, I think it's 13 states of a corpse rotting on the charnel ground. So in those days, they would leave the corpse out to be eaten by vultures and wild animals. And monks were instructed, it was the general practice of the day, it was part of the self-mortification, to go out there and watch corpses slowly corrupt and disappear into dust.

The commentaries are very helpful. They tell you not to sit windward. Unfortunately we can't do that these days but interestingly enough if you're a monastic and you go to the east, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, the hospitals will let you in to see an autopsy and that's always quite an interesting thing to see because if you haven't, most people haven't seen a dead body, most people haven't felt a dead body, and it's quite an experience to actually see one and to catch its lifelessness, and how the mind wants to give it life. You look at the face of a corpse, and it's as though the mind wants to give it some expression, some movement, but it just won't. It's dead.

So there was a lovely story, while I'm on about it, about this, he's a Westerner. And he went to Sri Lanka, became a monastic. And he wanted to do this death meditation as the Buddha described it. So somehow he got the permission to get the body of a corpse of a convict, somebody in prison who died in prison. Somehow he got permission to do this. And he carried this corpse on his back to where he was living in this cave. And there he built a cage, a glass cage with a funnel. And he put the body in it. And he observed the rotting of the body.

Well, when the newspapers heard about this, they declaimed, finally, a real monk. Finally, we've got somebody who can really look at this. Anyway, as the story ends, he finally left the order and went off to help Mother Teresa in Calcutta, I think. So I think it must have done something for him.

That's a bit extreme, of course. We needn't do that. Just contemplating our own death is often enough. And every so often when you wake up with a pain that you haven't had before, or during the day with a pain, just watch that fear that comes, the fear of death. So it's just something that you can bring in just as a small daily practice.

These practices, the *vipassanā*, the *mettā*, the contemplations that we do in the evening about sickness, aging and death, it's just this constant little reminder every day that works. And it doesn't take a second, it doesn't take any time, it's just that little reminder every day. And it very slowly changes our attitude to the way we're living.

Now the other side of *anicca*, so one part of *anicca* guides us into the *dukkha*, the suffering, and the other side, of course, is because it's impermanent, it takes away any sense of substantiality. So it takes us into the *anattā* teaching about not-self. So starting with *anicca*, it's a perspective into the other two, into the suffering or the unsatisfactoriness and into the not-self.

But each of these, of course, have their own particular viewpoints. And when it comes to *dukkha*, the Buddha then expresses that through dependent origination. And in dependent origination, he points very clearly at two places where this whole *dukkha* rests, the whole problem of unsatisfactoriness rests. And he starts off by that *avijjā*, that not knowing, not knowing.

So it's through not knowing that we make a mistake and we form a wrong relationship with this psychophysical organism, this human being. And if you think about it, it's understandable. Because when we're born, what do we know? And you just find yourself in this body. You are this body. And it's quite understandable that we should think that this is what we are. And we end up living with that delusion.

Now, because of that, we try to seek happiness in this form. Now, that's the driving force, is it not, of our life? To seek happiness. Isn't that the driving force? Happiness in however you wish to define it. So some people might define it as a wonderful relationship, others riches, others fame, others lots of money, others all of that. So it depends on how you define your happiness. That's what you're chasing.

And seeking some permanent happy state in the human form always lets us down. It lets us down, A, because it's impermanent, but the attachment itself has its own consequence of suffering, which we've been through, especially around pleasure. So remember, what happens is we form our happinesses around things that we collect. These things can be the money, it can be fame, it can be power, it can be people. It doesn't matter what it is, we collect them.

And the more we collect of these happinesses, the more we feel safe, the more we feel secure, and the more we feel happy. A person feels much more happy if they have a billion pounds in the bank than if they have one million pounds in the bank. Your happiness grows with the amount of money you've got.

So these happinesses are an accumulation of things. This accumulation now has to be guarded. Other people want what you have. Other people want your billion pounds for a start. And anybody that

undermines this happiness must be annihilated as quickly as possible. So there you've got your aversion, which is pushing away anything which is undermining you. And if what is undermining you is too big to handle, then you've got to run for it. So there you have your three basic attitudes that arise out of this wrong relationship. Acquisitiveness, aversion and fear.

And once we've got those attitudes, we start acting upon them. That produces unwholesome actions, which themselves have unwholesome consequences. Because it all demands that the world be moved and shifted in order to satisfy my happiness. So from a delusive point of view, I'm constantly manipulating the world so that I can feel comfortable, I can feel happy. So I'm in constant conflict with the world, except in those small moments when I've finally got it. And then it lasts, what, a couple of seconds, a few days at most, and it's gone.

And then I'm back on the trail again of trying to get this happiness. This manifests as *tanha*, this special word that the Buddha uses, which we translate as craving, which is far too strong because it doesn't include the little small attachments, the little small attachments that we have, the small little selfishness. I'm just taking that big piece of cake. Everybody else takes the little one. And so it's that whole area of grasping, wanting, needing in that psychological sense. That's the attachment.

So wherever there's attachment, there's a psychological dependency on it for happiness. When we describe that happiness, when we say, well, what do I mean when I say I am happy? I think you'll agree with me when I say we're talking about a mental state. If I put pleasant food in my mouth but it doesn't make me happy, then I just spit it out and try another dish. I'm looking to food to make me happy. I'm looking to a relationship to make me happy. And this happiness always defines a mental state, mainly the emotional content of that mental state. It's never the object itself which is happiness. It may be the proximate cause of the happiness, in other words, something that I'm dependent on, but what I'm really trying to do is to create a happy state within myself.

Now, that's when the seeing of *anicca* comes in, because when you realize that these happiness states are not under your control, that you can bring them up under certain circumstances, but that they just change whether you want them to or not, and sometimes the same circumstance that made you happy then doesn't make you happy now. So we're constantly, as drug addicts say, chasing the dragon. And that's the point of *tanha*.

So what the Buddha's pointing to is, A, there's a profound misunderstanding underneath our lives, and it manifests as this form of greed, aversion and fear. And the consequence of that is, of course, guilt, shame, remorse, etc., etc. And if you don't have guilt, shame or remorse, then you end up being callous, hard, unfeeling, unforgiving. So here, what he's describing is the psychology which is causing us problems: this fundamental misunderstanding as to who we are, and therefore we seek happiness in the phenomenal world, that is the world of the psychophysical organism, we'll come to that in a minute, and that manifests through this word, this *tanha*.

So in our meditation, what we're trying to do is constantly to separate out the given from the reaction. And that's the process of seeing how we create suffering for ourselves. So the given might be a pleasant mental state, some sort of memory. This is in our meditation here and now. It could be something that we went out in nature and it gives us pleasure and it gives us a certain pleasurable feeling. And what we are catching is how we're relating to that. How we're relating to that. And how when it doesn't satisfy us there's a feeling of disappointment or a feeling of boredom. So there's a whole psychology around the relationship we have with the world that we experience. And it's catching that and then of course the practice of not joining in, not actually identifying with it, to be able to name it and to know it and not to identify with it.

And very slowly this relationship changes, away from that wanting to manipulate the world, moving towards this is the way it is, that radical, straightforward acceptance of each and every moment as it arises. There's an undermining of wanting to push away the unpleasant, but of accepting it.

When I was at Kandaboda in the monastery there, I was in the back end of the monastery in my own kuti, my own hut. And there was a block of rooms not so far from me. I could see them through the trees. Maybe about, I don't know, 30 metres or so. And foreigners would come into that. Not singles. It was actually built for foreigners. And so there'd be this constant change of people coming in and coming out. Some of them, of course, were very serious meditators, utterly committed. But some of them were absolute... Well, prats, for want of a better word.

They used to complain to the abbot, you know, and say, well, you know, he's doing this. This was the male section. The female section, I didn't know anything about because there's a wall around it. And they would go to the abbot and say, he's doing this and he's doing that. And the abbot would never do anything.

And there was one point where we had this self-professed schizophrenic. And he would sit out there in the nude, and sometimes he'd jump up and jump around and dance. It was an absolute riot. And eventually, I felt that this was just... You know, a bit beyond the pale, you know what I mean? A little bit of disturbance, fine, you accept this and all that. So I went to see the abbot thinking that I would have this great authority as a monk rather than a layperson. And I explained to him that, you know, this was very injurious to the whole practice and it was messing people up. But he did nothing, you see. He did nothing at all, you see.

And I went back and I thought, hmm, it's very interesting. And then I realised, of course, that that's what we're constantly doing. Whenever something which disturbs us comes, especially when something is, shall we say... evil, perhaps that's too strong a word, when we see something as dangerous or we find somebody who threatens us, our attitude is to move away. And that, of course, allows the person to have full reign of the situation. Whereas what the teaching was to me was, yes, there is this disturbance and at some point or other it will go and you stay with it. And that's what happened. He disappeared. He went one day and he never came back.

And if you take that on a political level, you see how important it is that when something happens in a

country where there's some manifestation of some real wrong thinking, some evil. The good people tend to shy away, tend to go away, instead of staying there and working with it and eventually undermining it.

So this whole idea about delusion manifests in many, many subtle ways in our lives. Always remember trying to manipulate the present moment or doing something about the present moment to make ourselves feel comfortable or at best happy. And it's catching that, it's catching that, you see, and then allowing the wisdom to arise, which is, given this situation, what ought to be done from a truly ethical point of view. And that undermines this wrong understanding, you see. As it were, it drops downwards through the process to the whole idea of me.

In those happy hippie days, people used to go around saying, I do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. That was the greatest expression of Western individualism you could get. To hell with the world. I will do my own thing in my own way, in my own time. Forget the rest of you. I'm the one who's important here.

And that process of constantly letting go of attachment, of constantly working with the unpleasant, of constantly not trying to manipulate the present, you see, is undermining this sense of an isolated self. And that's when you begin to make connections with the world around you. That's when you begin to begin to establish a different relationship, not based on this very solid idea of a self or an ego.

So for instance, when the Buddha visits these three monks who happen to be fully liberated, he calls them the Anurudas, I think. He says to the chief monk, he says, how is it you live peacefully together? He said, well, every morning we say to ourselves, what if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do? That's not quite, I do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And in any group of people, of course, everybody has to say that or else it doesn't work because you just get abused. But if that was our attitude, you can see how we begin to feel much more at ease with life, by asking the people around us, what do they want to do? And not just going into a situation and saying, well, this is the way I want it to be.

So this whole area of *dukkha*, of unsatisfactoriness, has to do with both the acquisitiveness, which we've been looking at through the eating process, through trying to enjoy life with that override of indulgence, which simply means attachment and trying to create a beautiful mental state by stuffing ourselves. And the other side of it is the actual suffering, the bit where we become averse, where we become fearful, anxious, where it gets on top of us and we get depressed, etc., etc. All that belongs to this deep, profound, wrong relationship we have with this psychophysical organism.

So now, when we begin to understand this, we move to that slightly deeper level of not-self, not-me, not-mine. And what we're doing here is we are beginning to disidentify with this psychophysical organism. So when we're sitting in meditation and we're using these little noting words, and especially if you preface them with 'there', so there's pain, there's unhappiness, there's sadness, there's joy, whatever it is, what we're doing is we're pushing it away from ourselves. We're disidentifying.

Just very quickly, if we go back to when we were born, there's a woman called Margaret Mahler who was a student of Freud and she studied babies up to about the age of three. And what she discovered was that for the first three or four months all there is is this blanket of sensation, an undifferentiated sensation, except that some were painful and some were pleasant. And then slowly out of four months there looms your first object, usually your carer, your mother. And very slowly the baby pushes the world out, creates a 3D world. That seems to be what's happening when they're reaching out for rattles and stuff. They're actually creating that world. So it's not as though we're born with that. We're born with the potential of creating that phenomenal world, but it has to be developed. And it's not until the age of three, thereabouts, two and a half, three, that the child says, I am a boy, I am a girl, and everything else isn't me. It's taken three years.

Now, what we're doing is, we are taking that process inwardly. We're separating out of this person that we've made, you see, and what constitutes the person. The person is made up of the body, the image of the body, of the pleasures and the pain that the body gives us. The person is made of these emotions and our habits and our thought patterns and all our conditioning. All that is then put into this concept of a person. This is me. And by sitting and finding this observation post within ourselves, this place where we can observe and feel things, what we're actually doing is exactly what the baby did with that two-dimensional world, creating a three-dimensional world, creating itself away from there. We are beginning to isolate this awareness from everything that it's aware of. And that is the process of liberation.

The process of liberation is both this liberating ourselves from the wrong desire of things, the wrong attachment to things, but at this deep level it's disidentification. So we relocate ourselves backwards until we reach this self-awareness, this observer, the feeler, the witness, the one who knows. And every time we fall into the old habit of becoming this other self, right, then that's the point where we have to jump out and recognize the mistake we've made.

So when you have a pain, a headache, and you say, oh, I've got a headache, so you stop and say, hold on, no, no, there is a headache. Every time you have an emotion, you say, oh, I feel so depressed, I feel so anxious, you say, ah, no, there's depression, there's anxiety. So that's a constant practice that we have to take in our daily lives, constantly separating out.

But remember that that's also a false position because here we have this new self it's another self who is disidentifying with everything and there's a danger there that you become so disidentified with it that you're no longer engaged so that itself is not a pleasant place to be so you still have to go into the psychophysical organism but you go in with right intention.

And it's that ability to go in with right intention that reinforces the wisdom that you get from that disidentifying in other words through disidentifying you're undermining all those consequences of delusion which is the greed, the fear, the aversion and by going in with right intention and becoming your action, being your actions, your thoughts, your wholesome thoughts, your wholesome speech, your skillful

actions, you're actually reinforcing and manifesting and reinforcing your right understanding of the way things are. And that manifests always as some shade of the four illimitables. Love, which is that basic connection, compassion, joy and peacefulness or equanimity.

Now remember that that position of the self in the observer is also a false position. Because there's two people there, there's two things there rather. There's the observing and there's the observing of the self. Self-awareness. So you can't be that either. You can't be the object that you're aware of. But unfortunately, you can't get beyond that state by an act of will.

You can get beyond the body. As soon as we know that, as soon as I look at something or feel something as an object, I've disidentified with it. And you can do it with an emotion rather than just becoming it. Rather than just being angry, you can say, there is anger. And we can do it with images. Thoughts are more difficult because they're so fast. But when we're highly concentrated, well, when we've got a decent, steady concentration, you can catch thoughts coming. Sometimes they're like neon lights in front of you. And that's this constant pulling away, re-establishing an inner sense of self, this self-observer.

But you can't get rid of that image. You can't get rid of the self. Because that's an image of the knowing in the mirror of the mind. It's like when you look in a mirror, you can't get rid of that face. Every time you look in a mirror, it's there. See?

Now, the unfortunate thing is, I think most people think, that when they look in the mirror and they see their face, they think that's the way people see them. But it's a great horror and shock when they actually use the second mirror to see this mirror image. Because remember, it's turned round. That's why if you put writing up in the mirror, you can't read it. It's the other way round, you see? And it comes as a great shock to know how big your nose really is. See? And it's the same when you hear your voice first recorded. You know, God, I don't sound like that. Or worse, when you're videoed. I didn't think you were behaving like that.

Anyway, so it's beginning to recognize that that is an image, you see. So now, when everything is absolutely quiet, when everything is really, really still, and I've been saying this to a few of you, you know, turn that gaze inward towards the knowing. Turn the gaze inwards towards the knowing and ask yourself afterwards, what is the knowing made of? What's constituted? What constitutes it?

So for instance, when we go into pain and we go into what constitutes pain, we might find tightness or heat and all those sorts of things. So now we know that that's the reality of the situation, inverted commas. That there is sensation. Pain is a mental construct. So this sense of self, you see, it is telling us something about our true nature. And it's that investigation that begins to undermine this really, really deep and basic mistake we've made about identity.

And in that vein, the Buddha states quite clearly that mind is foremost. Mind is there right at the beginning and it's there right at the end. It's the most important thing. Now just consider for a minute, you

see. Photons are coming into our eyes. Pressure waves are hitting the ear. But these are actually quite minimal information. When you see diagrams of what happens to a person's eye when they look at a picture, it's going all over the place. But the actual viewer of the picture still sees the picture as a whole.

But the eye is actually moving at this tremendous speed, picking up little pixels here and there. So we have these sense bases which are sensitive to certain data, to certain information, but the information is quite minimal. And what the mind does is it takes it into what's known as, in Buddhism, the inner sense door, the mind door, and there it's filled out. And I read somewhere that actually what happens in the eye is that this filling out is then put back onto the retina. So it gives us a real picture, inverted commas.

So there's a whole thing going on inside this complex of the brain and mind. And what we end up with is the world that we've actually created. That is the phenomenal world. And it's beginning to recognize that that isn't an objective thing. That is something that we are actually creating all the time. So that even though we would all agree that this room exists, in the sense that when we all leave, it doesn't disappear, the fact is there are as many rooms here as there are people, in terms of experience of it.

So now, grasping that, the world I'm living in is being manufactured by me, part of it is given, both the pleasant part and the unpleasant part. And that we have to accept with this radical acceptance. But what I do with it afterwards, the misery and horror that I create afterwards, is totally my own doing. Nobody can make me angry, nobody can make me sad. If that was so, if it was so that people could make me angry, could make me sad, could make me depressed, could make me happy, then to become fully liberated, I'd have to get rid of you all. Because full liberation is perfect happiness.

It is because we create our own happiness, our sadness, that we can become, each of us, individually liberated before other people. So that is also part of understanding of this not self, not substance. Nothing is substantial.

So that's what our practice is doing. It's guiding us to see impermanence in a much more direct way, in a much more experiential way, that things actually do come to an end. And these exercises that we've mentioned around death and around, especially that other one about saying goodbye. See, constantly saying goodbye. Thank you, goodbye. Thank you, goodbye. You have a pleasant meal with somebody and then when it's finished you say thank you, goodbye. You don't say that to them. You're saying it internally. Say that internally to yourself.

And every time you see a good DVD or any time you've had some degree of happiness, actually be grateful for it. Really accept that there was a time when I was happy and then goodbye. And that allows us to keep finishing, to keep bringing to an end because we don't like to see endings.

And that's something you could do tomorrow, is to put more accent on seeing the ending of things. The seeing of beginning of things we're habituated to, because beginning for us means new, and new usually means good. But end usually means bad. And although we see the rising star, the great pop star, nobody

ever knows what happens to them. They just disappear.

This seeing of *anicca*, the *dukkha* is much more psychological, it's much more felt. You can grasp it much more quickly because you can see, you can feel the unsatisfactoriness and the way that we're attaching to things. And the *anattā* is slightly more difficult to see, but it's there to be seen by constantly pointing to our experiences. There is, there.

And that business of no control. The whole idea of a self is that it's in control. If it's not in control of something, the control center must be in somewhere else. If I am my body, I should be able to say, right, from now on you're never going to get ill and you're not going to grow old. Full stop. But it's the fact that the control center of the body is within the body and not in that which wants the body to not grow old, etc. Shows me that it can't be me.

And then finally, just cutting down to the quick about that relationship. Constantly questioning it. And remember that although the talk has been mainly about undermining what is delusive, remember that as we do that, the opposite arises quite naturally. As soon as we cut through a delusion, wisdom arises naturally. Whereas delusion manifests in self-centeredness, selfishness, in aversion and in cruelty. The opposites just happen naturally. They just arise naturally. Generosity, love, and compassion.

It's not as though you can't help them on a bit through exercise and practice, but it's not as though there's an intermediate state where there's nothing. Either you're cruel or you're compassionate. Either you're hateful or you're loving. There's no intermediate state between those two. So the gift of practicing like this is a movement of our characters and personalities towards the beautiful. It just happens naturally.

So there's hope. I can only hope my words of being of some assistance have not created further confusion and despair. And that through your devotion to practice and careful investigation of these three characteristics of existence, you will become liberated sooner rather than later.

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