Ethics, Not-Self and Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1:06:15

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 this evening to wander around this notion, this understanding of not-self and ethics.

The Buddha belonged to what's known as the Axial Age—quite a lift in terms of human consciousness at the time, 2,500 years ago. We have Confucius and Lao Tzu. Confucius turned what was empty ritual into something meaningful, coming from the heart. Moses got rid of all these mammon and such, established a single god, but most of all, an ethical code which wasn't based on the power of gods or trying to appease gods. And then you have Socrates, of course, at the same time, who brought rationality to the fore, undermining superstition. In the Buddha's own country, people like Mahāvīra and others were really trying to investigate consciousness, which was, I think, more of an Indian thing—rather than concerning relationship to the world, it was a peculiar investigation by Indians into what consciousness was as such. The Buddha belongs to that sort of rise of understanding in human society. Of course, even today, not many of us have risen to that, but at least it stands as a standard where we can aim.

In the Buddha's time, the distinction between the world and consciousness wasn't so objective as we might think these days through our scientific revolution, where the West pulled rationality completely out of its connection with the heart and created this very scientific way of looking at the world. We've got all our knowledge from it—subatomic physics and the technology that goes with it—but there's a loss of connection to the heart. The first people who revolted against that were the romantics: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Schelling, Wordsworth. They all rebelled against this hard science which really understood the universe as some sort of machine. Everything was like a jigsaw; all you had to do was fit it out. God became the God outside the machine that he'd created.

The Buddha himself stands within a tradition which is not so technological. Carts and oxen, you know—all his imagery is about agriculture. But there was this huge interest in consciousness and what that meant. In those days, as I think it was for the ancients, even Socrates perhaps, the world as we experience it is the only world that consciousness can offer us. Through the mind and body, whatever we're aware of is, as far as we're concerned, the world. We might think that the world exists out there, or know through science that the world exists out there—light years away, all these planets, galaxies and solar systems. But actually, we don't know that by our personal direct experience. Neither do scientists, really. What they get is light from who knows when. They only presume that it's carrying on; it might have all finished light

years ago.

The Buddha's not really concerned with that sort of thing. There's a telling passage where somebody asks him, "Where does the world come to an end?" And he said, "That's not rightly put. That's not the right question to ask." He says the question that should be asked is, "Where does the world not find a footing?" That's a completely different question. What he's pointing to is a level of awareness, or an attainment of an awareness, which doesn't belong to the world. What he means by the world is everything that the body, mind and heart can create—everything you see and feel, your thoughts. All that belongs to the world of present-day consciousness, moment-to-moment consciousness. And he's saying that there's something that transcends that, not touched by any of it, not touched by any of the senses, including the mind.

And he states this as simply the end of suffering.

So why is it that ethics is so important? That's the question that really begs an answer, because you might think, well, enlightenment—or awakening rather—is really just a matter of contacting this level, making it stable, holding it there, and that's about it. That's the end of the job. It's a process of just insight, just sitting, just keep looking and looking, and eventually the penny will drop.

But somehow the Buddha interlocks really deeply our whole behavior—our thinking process, how we relate to people, and so on. And this goes back to what's known as the three knowledges that came to him when he was awakened.

The first one was that all the defilements had gone. He had no more defilements in his heart. So that's also an ethical statement. There was no defilement left in his heart. There was no anger. There was none of all that sort of stuff.

And then he said that he saw a series of his past lives, where he saw that they were driven by his ethical decisions. So in the three knowledges, his awakening is not described as some sort of way-out state, blissed out and all that. It's telling you what there isn't there. And what there isn't there are these defilements.

And then he says that these defilements were originally created by him through a series of lifetimes. And the third knowledge was that he saw beings moving from realm to realm dependent on their ethical decisions, their morality. So what was a personal law for him became a universal law. And he even included animals.

Now that might be a bit strange to us, but there are clips on YouTube now where, without any doubt, at least the higher animals do make ethical decisions—though perhaps not quite as consciously as we do.

So where does the problem of relationship begin? And how does it manifest? And how is it we get it wrong?

The process that we're going through is twofold. We're actually trying to understand how we create this mess. And we're also going through a process of purification, where we begin to allow these

defilements—that's what he calls them, defilements—to arise and pass away. The process of insight meditation is that dual process.

So it's not a process of developing the heart. That's done by other exercises such as metta practice. And through action—through compassionate, loving, joyful actions. Don't forget joy. Everybody talks about compassionate love but forgets joy. You can actually be joyful and rejoice in somebody else's joyfulness. That's also part of the Buddha mind that we're trying to develop.

So this opening up to our own hearts in meditation is part and parcel of allowing these defilements to go. In the Buddha's own experience, even though he was liberated during that moment, there was still what's known as vasana. Vasana are leftover habits within the mind. And so it is said that for seven years, Mara the evil one chased him with his three daughters: sensual desire, sexual desire, and—those of you who know, you mustn't say—but those of you who don't know, what was the third one? Have a guess.

Yes. Did you know? No. Well done. Fantastic. Very rare anybody gets that.

Yes, boredom. Because as we discussed this morning, boredom is the engine that pushes you to seek more and more excitement, to seek something different to do. And it took seven years for Mara to finally leave him. His daughters insisted on that.

But he gave up. And what he says is, the Buddha sees me. See, the Buddha sees me. Now, of course, that's put in a mythological sense. When we, in our meditation, observe our defilements come up—be it anger or something exciting or planning—just the seeing of them releases us from their grasp. Just to be able to see them. This seeing, of course, also means to feel them, to actually experience them as they arise and pass away within that awareness, that consciousness.

So we've got these mental defilements coming up, and they are habits. They are known as sankhāras, habits that we have created ourselves. And the essential thing about the sankhāras is that they are empowered through will. So the Buddha goes as far as to state that an act and the act of will, in his sense, are one and the same thing. Will and an act are one and the same thing.

So when we find ourselves thinking about something which is unpleasant and we're indulging in it, there's actually an act of will in there. The same when we speak something or when we act. And even when we do it unwittingly, even when we do it unintentionally as it were, there's actually been a moment of intention.

We talk about habitual unethical actions, and then really empowered ethical action—when you really, really decide to murder your rival. That's a clear decision in time that you are actually going to murder them, not that you do it sort of unintentionally. So often a lot of our thoughts that come up and we get dragged into are just because of these habits. And what we discover in our meditation, of course, is that they're incredibly powerful. Even if we struggle against them, they're always there in the background. Even if we become acutely aware of our greed, there are always these sneaky little selfishnesses where we

take the biggest slice of cake and things like that. These are very sneaky little things.

And so the ability to actually see these things is a liberation. But remember, we're not entirely liberated from them because then there has to be the decision not to engage. And that's what we're learning through our meditation—that no matter what unethical thoughts or habits come up, we can distance from them and refuse to engage.

Of course, the danger there is that in the refusal to engage, you're actually very subtly pushing them away. And we push things away out of aversion and fear. Those are our repressive measures. So one thing we come to be aware of is that there's an internal mechanism whereby we make things worse.

Here comes the old greed, you see, and then there's the empowerment of the greed by way of indulgence. Here comes a little hateful thought about somebody and we empower it because we actually enjoy it. Yes, of course we do. We enjoy getting angry with people and biffing them on the nose and things like that. There's a certain enjoyment in it. Otherwise we wouldn't do it.

So when it comes to depression, we don't want to go into that sort of mental state, so we push it away, push it away by distracting ourselves. A lot of the pleasures that we have in life are empowered not only because we enjoy them and indulge them, but because they're ways of not facing up to this other horrible stuff. And that's why addictions are so difficult to get rid of. And I'm not talking about big, heavy addiction. I'm just talking about, you know, biscuits and things like that.

So in a sense, when we understand that, then we see where the struggle is. When the Buddha's last words are, "Strive diligently," he doesn't say hang about and think about things and investigate. It's strive. Sampadeta is a very strong word. It's not sort of work at it. You've got to work at it.

And you can see from our meditation that the work is not only something that you can do the once and then you'll never be greedy again. These snakes and crocodiles appear constantly. As soon as we see something that we have a relationship of indulgence with, immediately the greed for it arises.

So these sankhāras, our internal habits, are really to be known. That's what the Buddha says. You've got to know how they arise. You've got to know how to let them go and let them disappear. And you've got to know how, in such a way, that they never arise again.

Of course, they never arise again only once the deep, fundamental problem is sorted out. And that has to do with identity.

So in one way of looking at the path, it's put in these three different ways: sīla, samādhi, and paññā. Sīla meaning morality, samādhi concentration, and paññā insight. And it's interesting that as the Buddha describes the Eightfold Path, he comes down from the insight path, and the insight becomes systemic. So once you have insight into, for instance, how indulgence creates suffering, this has to move into an attitude. That's your second factor on the Eightfold Path—sammāsaṅkappa, right attitude. You've got to

change your attitude to indulgence.

Noreen, whom some of you know, does an email course. And there was one young fellow there—the exercise was around seeing greed and whatnot. And this young fellow wrote back and said that once he'd begun to do this practice, he just wasn't enjoying things as he wanted to. So he wasn't ready for that, and he would stop the exercise. It just shows how deep is our commitment to greed. And that commitment manifests also in all the other negative stuff too.

So this sīla, this morality in the path, comes after that. It comes after right attitude. Then you get right speech, right action, and right livelihood. But the way that we can also see it is that you can go the other way. So you can start looking at our ethical behavior, and that will also begin to change our attitude. The more we change our attitude, of course, it has to come back into the way we understand things. You can't change your attitude and not also change your understanding. So the path is a feedback loop, a sort of feedback loop system.

And you lose nothing by really putting the accent of your spiritual life into right relationship—which might be a definition for ethics. Ethics is basically how you relate to human beings, to animals, to nature, and so on. And by putting the accent on that and seeing how we relate to those things, how we're creating suffering for ourselves but also situations where other people might suffer—remember, we don't cause other people to suffer, but we can definitely create situations where it's very difficult for them not to make the decision that they're going to suffer. So it's a case of recognizing that we also have a responsibility to create situations for other people where they may not make these wrong decisions.

By coming back onto that, you see, you immediately change your attitude. And that attitude is one of connection, isn't it? So another word for connection is love. That's all. Love, in its most universal sense, is a sort of sense of interconnectedness, a sense of an interconnectedness with the all, as the Buddha would say—which is the all within our consciousness. And to make that connection as the connection demands.

So sometimes, as you know, there can be a certain directness, a certain assertiveness. You can be very assertive and not seem kindly, but it's exactly what was needed in that particular situation. And other times, of course, you can be very warm-hearted, compassionate, and so on. So it's a sort of sensitivity that we have to develop towards any situation we're in. And that means that you've got to launch your attention outwardly into other people around you, into the animals you see, into nature and all that sort of stuff. And not only take this very isolated position of me in the midst of all this. The me has to turn towards a sort of connection which produces a we, a sort of communion, a community.

So all of that, of course, is part and parcel of this growing ethical relationship to the world. One other way of perhaps talking about ethics is to try and create situations which are to our own benefit. The Buddha talks about our own benefit, the benefit of somebody else—you might do something which is not to your particular benefit but to somebody else's benefit—and to both myself and to another. And in that sort of relationship where you have that connection, it's always demanding a certain generosity. And that

generosity has the ability to make that connection real, because you're giving. You're giving something of yourself, whether your wealth or your time, for the benefit of others. And at times you're giving it to yourself.

Sometimes you deserve a biscuit. Very rare, of course, but occasionally you might say, well, I deserve a biscuit.

So it's a case of recognizing that ethics is beginning to change our attitude. And as you move outward towards people, move outwards towards nature and animals and all that sort of stuff, of course, you find the opposite—that they're coming towards you. That's the point. They're coming towards you. And that's where the interconnectedness, shall we say, becomes more real for us.

Because we realise that the whole thing is some sort of theatre piece. It's a sort of play that we're in. A serious one. If you want to take a Hindu image of it, a dance, or a Mahayana one, Indra's net. Everything is interconnected and those interconnections are holographic. They contain everything else within themselves as potential.

So our behaviour in ordinary daily life, the way we act in ordinary daily life, is this constant effort to see the situation more fully, not just myself isolated as an individual. That's very much a Western thing, this individuality business. I do my own thing in my own way in my own time, to hell with you lot. And that sort of individuality causes us to disconnect with people, tremendous loneliness, and with it, of course, anxiety.

Somehow we have to reverse that process and begin to make these connections, to create a sense of community, even if the people whom you're with have no sense of community at all. So you're catching the whole situation where everybody's these individual little pods looking after themselves. And we've somehow got to make that connection with them, to see that they are undermining potential by only turning in towards themselves, only what I want. And that by opening up to that, your relationship changes somewhat, and it opens up for them the possibility of changing their relationship.

On the negative side, there's that Russian-American author—Ayn Rand with Atlas Shrugged. So the arch-individualist, and it's funny that she was Russian, coming from presumably a communist background. This sort of arch-individualist position where it's up to you. You're the one that has to make the world. You're the one who makes decisions, and the world you live in is completely manufactured by you. You did it.

And so all these people in Silicon Valley, one or two of them anyway, believe that the billions they've got is all because of me. I did it. Without me, this would never have happened. Now, in a sense, of course, there is a touch of truth in that. They probably instigated it. They probably had the first idea, like Steve Jobs. Really a man of wonderful little ideas. But to say that all these billions came because of me, to hell with the workforce, to hell with everybody else who's putting in their little contributions—it's just an insanity.

You're so isolated, they should put you away.

So it's a case of recognizing that the West especially got itself into this corner. Eastern people don't think like that. I saw a program on China, and there was a young woman there saying that she felt they thought differently. They thought more in terms of community. That sort of bringing in other people in some sort of connection where you don't see yourself as forging ahead, the lone pioneer, creating the world just for yourself. And that's very much, of course, the Buddha's own way of looking at things.

So here we have somebody who has this tremendous insight. And for one moment, as you know, those of you who know the story, he doubts whether anybody would understand it. He discovers something which is so extraordinary. And there's nothing like it being taught anywhere else, remember. He doesn't think people would really grasp it. And he says, it would be just an annoyance to me to try and do it, constantly trying to make people understand this sort of stuff.

But then, in the myth, this great god appears and tells him that there are some with only a little bit of dust in their eyes, and so off he goes. And there's a lovely little telling tale of how he learns how to be a teacher. So remember, the insight doesn't make you a genius. It doesn't make you a teacher.

It doesn't make you anything else.

So on his way back to see these old companions of his—that was his first thought, to return to these companions with whom he had struggled—he meets another ascetic. The ascetic sees him and perceives the charisma, perhaps the glow emanating from this enlightenment he has just experienced. And he says to him, "You're amazing. Who is your teacher? How did you attain this?"

And the Buddha replies, "I am my own teacher. I am the savior of the world. I am the fully liberated one."

And the fellow says, "All right, okay," clicks his head, and off he goes.

So the Buddha must have learned pretty quickly that's not quite how you get the message across.

When he actually meets his old companions, it's completely different, because there he returns to an old relationship, a friendship with them. And there's a whole process of discussing. While he's talking with them about what he's discovered, which is slowly being formalized in his mind, he constantly asks the question, "Have you ever heard me speak like this?" As he's talking to them, he interrupts himself: "Have you ever heard me speak like this? Have you ever heard me say anything like this?" And very slowly, they're drawn to his teachings, and actually all become fully liberated in these wonderful stories.

So this whole business of relationship goes right back, in terms of the Buddha's teaching, right back to him. He didn't just sit there with a sign saying "Do not disturb, I'm fully liberated." He actually got up and walked. From Bodh Gaya to where he found his companions over in Sarnath, just north of Varanasi—I can't remember exactly, but it's perhaps three or four hundred miles. India's a big place, you know. It wasn't as though he thought he'd just nip down to Dublin and have a little chat with his old mates. You've

got to walk.

So here we have this teaching about sīla, about morality. What we're saying is that if we keep our attention on that, this is something we can actually do. You can't make a decision to have an insight. You can't say, "Well, look, I'm going to sit down now and I'm going to have a great insight and liberate myself." It just doesn't work. It doesn't work like that.

We cannot make ourselves have an insight. Insights come when the conditions are ripe. But what we can do is genuinely correct our behavior and become much more aware of how the delusion is manifesting—the essential delusion concerning the self. And that's something we can perceive. Through the meditation, if we can maintain a certain level of awareness in daily life, if we don't find ourselves rushing and so forth but try to maintain a certain calmness, then we should slowly change these habits. We slowly allow habits we see as unhealthy to die away, and we build up the good ones through these practices of mettā, through goodwill practices, and through having right attitude.

Take work, for instance. It may be that work is hard at this time. It may be meaningless to you—it doesn't have any particular significance. You just ended up doing this work because that's what was on offer. It simply brings home the bacon. But you can change your attitude completely and see it as one of service. And then you immediately connect with whomever you're serving.

There was an example of somebody who worked at the toll booths on motorways. The way she made it meaningful to herself was to greet people when they came through—genuinely. "What a great day! How are you?" There was a sort of connection there. It wasn't just "stick the money in there" while looking really glum inside this little box. She found meaningfulness from it, from just that simple connection. And that, of course, lifts your heart.

So there are all sorts of little parts of our lives. If you keep a diary or some sort of log in the morning, you see...

Who are the first people you meet? Have you prepared yourself to meet them?

In the morning, if you're going to work and there are people whom you're upset with, if you direct your goodwill towards them, it does change your behavior toward them. And when they see that you're not angry, that you're not about to get your revenge, it opens up a little avenue for them to reestablish a working relationship. Not always, but at least one can try. So there's a whole process of ethical behavior which we can actually get hold of, which we can actually do something about.

But when we go deeper into ethical behavior, we come across this business of a self. And really, that's where the trouble lies. When the Buddha talks about delusion—these three things: greed, aversion, and delusion, or acquisitiveness, aversion which also includes fear, and delusion—this delusion is really one of identity. The meditation is trying to undermine this wrong identity we have by making everything into an object for ourselves.

That's the importance of really noting, really creating that space between the knowing—at this point the knower, the feeler, the one who knows—and really holding that point within ourselves where we are actually not so much aware of what's happening, but aware of the distance between the knower and what's happening. For instance, looking at me now, you can be aware just of me, but you can also become aware of the space that is between us. It's becoming aware of the mental space that lies between the knower, the feeler, the one who is experiencing things, and the actual experience being had. By doing that, we're actually unwittingly disidentifying completely, because it's not me. The noting can be of great help here, because you're actually pointing to it: there's pain, there's an emotional state, there's an image in the mind. Thought is a bit more difficult, but the principle holds.

This process of disidentifying—all we're doing is relocating our identity. The basic identity would be physical. When we eat something and get lost in that beautiful taste, or when we trap our finger in the door, there's just that one moment where we are the body. Me and the pain—there's no separation. And then of course you jump out of it, get all angry and kick the door. It's a case of recognizing that there is a body self. What we mean by identity is a loss of self-awareness into becoming what it is we're experiencing.

Another example would be watching a DVD. You can watch from the point of view of an interest in the acting or the directing, in which case it always remains something objective you're looking at. But you can also just fall into it as an enjoyment, get lost in the mystery or the criminality or whatever it is, and lose the sense of me watching the film. Me and watching the film become one. At that point, you're identifying with all the mentation created by this film. You become the mind, the heart, your emotions. That's what we mean by identity.

So long as there's a sense of self observing something, feeling something, then it's a connection of possession. What I'm looking at is not me, but is owned by me. I'm talking internally here—pain in the knee would be "my knee." Even though I say "I feel anxious," the fact that I'm aware of it means it can't be me, but somehow I own it. Somehow I'm identifying with it as a point of ownership.

Ownership, of course, brings a lot of pain with it, as you know. Even with things you own, if somebody nips off with your mobile or something like that—it's a horror, isn't it? Weeping and gnashing of teeth, anger, calling the police. All of this arises negatively because somebody's thieved your phone. For heaven's sake.

We don't know the suffering behind possession until we lose what it is we possess. That's pretty straightforward. And when we look at it rationally, the only thing you can do with a thing—a phone or a TV or a car—is use it. You can only use things. To own it is a fiction, isn't it? A legal fiction, which works until the thief takes it. And then it's his.

It's no good you going around saying, "He's got my phone." It's his phone now.

I like to make this point because there was an occasion in the Sangha—the Buddhist order in Sri Lanka—where a thief came and stole a monk's little watch, or little clock as I remember it. The monk ran after the thief and got it back. And he was accused by Sangha members of thieving. He actually had to leave the order. Because it was no longer his, and he took it back. Which is really strange to anybody else in the world. But that's basically how it works. Strange, yes? So it makes you think about ownership.

We've got this relationship of identity with something. And remember that happiness—real happiness in the sense of an absolute happiness—is when we fall into the emotion of happiness. We become the happiness. When you watch an uproarious film and you're just laughing your head off, great guffaws and all that, you and the guffaw and the film become one and the same thing. When a comic comes on and you're laughing your head off, you and the comic—you lose that sense of "me watching television." You're just there within the laughter.

And that's one reason why people do these dangerous sports, because in a dangerous sport you've got to give your whole attention and you lose yourself in the sport. Canoeing down rapids and such, activities which are dangerous in themselves and which demand a heightened sense of awareness. You've got to be right there with the moment, and there's a sheer joy of the adrenaline coming up. You lose yourself into it, and it becomes like an addiction to try and get back into the zone.

These moments of happiness, when we're completely happy, paradoxically occur when we don't know it. As soon as you come out of that happy state, you've lost it. There may still be a feeling of happiness, but actually there's something in you which knows that the happiness is on the way out. It's gone. So it's one of these little paradoxes about identity. And it's the same, of course, on the negative side, when you identify with a hellish state, with something—just for that one moment, that's what you are.

So we have to take a little step even further back to find out where this sense of identity originates.

In our meditation, when we sit there observing, feeling, there's something like an observation post we've accessed. There's a lovely phrase that comes from Nyanaponika—his book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* is still a classic, really worth reading. There's some body up here somewhere, a couple of centimeters or so behind this point here, which is looking, feeling, and knowing everything from this sort of place. And from that place, we've detached from the body. It's no longer us. There's the body. That's why we use these noting words and we don't put in the sense of "I feel something." There's just the feeling. We're trying to make it quite objective. Same with emotions, same with images that come to the mind. That sort of disengagement, pulling this awareness out of its confusion with this psychophysical organism, just to be able to see it. And it finds itself as being this very objective observer, objective feeler, objective experiencer.

But of course, it can't be that either, can it? It can't be what it's aware of. The perceiver can't be the perceived. So this sense of "I am looking, I am feeling"—that sense of self there, right there—that can't be you either. Is that correct? Nod vigorously, please.

So there's something that is aware of itself. There's something that is aware of itself. Now, the only time we experience that, physically speaking, is when you look in the mirror. When you look in the mirror, you're aware that this is your face. But you know it's not your face. It's actually just a mirror image of your face. And of course, it's the wrong way around, isn't it?

It's not how people see you. You've all done the two mirror trick. I always ask that. Who hasn't done the two mirror trick? Fancy. Oh, you haven't lived. You've got to do the two-mirror trick. You look into a mirror, and you take a second mirror that looks into the mirror, and you've got to catch your face in this mirror because it's turned around again. Well, it's a horror thing, isn't it? It's like listening to your own voice for the first time. Or worse, seeing yourself in a video. There's something about that sense of self.

Now, I came across this. I remembered this myth of Narcissus. And in Greek psychology, of course, it's about a wrong self-love, a sort of pride, I think. He looks into the pool and falls in love with himself, as you might say. And of course, he goes to embrace it and falls into the water. Water is always, remember, an image of creation in mythology. So here we have, from a Greek point of view, somebody who falls in love with themselves through a sense of pride and whatnot. But it works brilliantly as an image for our essential delusion.

And the important thing to grasp is that we actually fall in love. We're actually in love with ourselves. That's the basic platform. We wake up, sometimes you wake in the morning and you say, "Here I am again," and sometimes you wake up and say, "Oh, not you again." But prior to that, you see, there must be a moment where this awareness becomes aware of itself. But it can never see itself. The eye cannot see itself. The nose can't smell itself. If the nose had a constant odor of, say, curry, how could you—everything else would be ruined by it. So the sense bases are completely clean of exactly what it is that they are aware of, that they sense.

So this awareness, you see, can never know itself as an object. And therefore that sense of self-awareness must be a delusion. The mirror image.

So now, what technique, what can we do to undermine that very deep delusion? Because that's our primary object. The primary object we make is this awareness coming into the mind and catching its own image. How do we experience that image of the self? It's a presence, isn't it? It's a sense of presence. Whenever you're awake, there's always you. There's always a sense of presence. Now that sense of presence is a feeling image of the awareness in the mind. So it's as though that now has to become the object to observe and to really see whether in fact it's permanent or not.

Now in Buddhist psychology, there are in the human being—the Buddha talks about these five aggregates. So the first one is the body. But it's not the physical body that you might think of. It's often translated as that, just our physicality. But you have to ask yourself, what is it you actually know of your body? Do you know what your liver is doing? Now, see? Have you any idea what's happening in your brain? Did you know it was mostly fatty substance? That's what they tell me anyway. Did you know that your body has

ten trillion individual cells? And they're all screaming for whatever. And you also host one hundred trillion guest cells, which are helping you do things like digest. Did you know that the cornea of your eye changes once every week?

Every week, you can look in the mirror and say, "You weren't here last week." And they tell you that every atom in your body changes every seven years. This is what they say.

So it's not as though we know the body. The body has its own little life form. Who knows what? What we can know is how we experience the body. And that's where this business of pain, pleasure, and all that sort of stuff comes in.

So that's the first aggregate—how we experience the body. And the basic experience of the body is the breath. It starts with the breath, and then we have what's known as the four elements, the four great elements: fire, earth, water, and air. These refer to temperature, pressure, elasticity, cohesion, and movement.

Whenever you drop down below pain, below the image of pain, and you go into the pain, then you're at the level of the body itself. Not the body itself, but how the mind experiences the body. That's your first heap—just an aggregate of sensations and feelings.

The next one is feelings. Feelings are physical and mental, not to be confused with mental states. They're what mental states create in the body as a feeling. So when you feel heavy because you're a bit depressed, that's the vedanā, that's the feeling. According to the Buddha, all these feelings are feelings. There's no need to differentiate them apart from the fact that some are coming from the body into the mind, and some are coming from the mind-heart into the body. So that is the connection there.

Then there's perceptions. These are, remember, your photocopies that you make. They grow into concepts—concrete concepts, even abstract concepts. What they do is make you look at the world in a certain way.

The third one is your saṅkhāras. These are your mental states, what we're referring to when we talk about our habits, the way we become happy, the way we become sad, and so on. The mental states that we're in.

And finally, consciousness. Now, the problem here is translation. The Buddha himself has difficulties trying to find the right word to express what he wants to express, and the words change depending on the situation.

In Pāli there are two major words: citta and viññāṇa. Citta refers to what we would normally have called in the old days the soul—not the everlasting spirit, but the soul meaning this combination of heart and mind, which we split. In our Age of Enlightenment, we took rationality and feeling away from each other. Citta brings them together as one composite. What you think, you feel, and what you feel, you think. If you look at every time you think of something, you'll see the heart's in there somewhere. And when the heart

moves, you'll see there's a thought related to it. So it's not as though they're completely separate. They're working one off the other. But they're obviously two different modes.

All these things have to be held somewhere. They have to be held somewhere to be known. That which knows is awareness. But something has to hold it long enough for it to be known. And that's the screen—that's the screen of consciousness.

When we talk about consciousness, we're not talking about the process of reasoning. We're not talking about the process of emotions and moods. We're not talking about the process of perceiving.

We're talking about some sort of multidimensional screen that just for a moment holds the totality of that moment for us, as we experience it through this psychophysical organism. So if I stub my toe, on the screen there just comes pain. That's the first moment. And then that disappears. And then comes the reason why I stubbed my toe.

So I'm getting this chopped up, momentary screening of what's happening in the present moment. And so fast is this screening that it's all joined together into a continuum. That's where we perceive some sort of continuity when it's not there. And the continuity gives us the impression of everlastingness. And that gives us the impression that it's always me—I never change. All these other things are changing, but not me.

This is one of the core insights of the Buddha: that the sense of me, the sense of self, is also arising and passing away. That's what he means when he says there is a self, but it's not a self. Because in those days, the self would have referred to something that we might now call an everlasting soul or a spirit. The self we're talking about is that mirror image being held every so often on that screen, and we get a sense of the feeling of presence there.

So in your meditation, when everything's quite calm and you're watching the breath, in that calmness, turn towards that sense of presence. Make it an object that you're looking at. In that way, you're coming to distance away from the mind at that initial level of contact, becoming more and more aware that what is aware is not part of that matrix—the body, heart, mind matrix. And that's the process of awakening. The awakening is in the awareness. It's not in the mind.

One of the other understandings that we have is that it's actually awareness that's suffering. The awareness is suffering through that wrong identity. The body doesn't suffer—the body just has pain. The heart doesn't suffer—the heart just has emotions. You can distance from them. Thoughts are hardly suffering; they're usually just flitting little things. So there's something in us which, through its wrong relationship, is actually causing suffering for itself.

And that's the Buddha within. That's where the search for the end of suffering is coming from. It's not coming from the body. It's not coming from our emotional or mental state. It's coming from this essential nature seeking its own liberation.

When you actually contemplate that, you can see how subtle it is. The problem is in the seeing. It's not in what is being seen.

I'll give you an example of that from when I went to Sri Lanka. I was standing with one or two monks and there was this barking going on. I couldn't work out what the barking was. It was monkeys—I didn't know monkeys barked. When they said, "Those are monkeys," I asked, "Where are they?" They pointed to this tree.

And for the life of me, I couldn't see any monkeys. I said, "I'm looking up there. Where?" I couldn't see them. They said, "There's a whole troop of them—about twenty, twenty-five of them up there." And I'm looking and looking and looking. And then just suddenly—whoosh—I can see these monkeys. They're everywhere. It's because my eye wasn't trained to see.

In that delusion, I would have gone away and said, "Well, monkeys are ghosts. Only some people can see them."

There was a case of somebody who was born blind—I read this little article—who was given sight. And the psychiatrist who was helping him would take him to places. The one that he mentioned was a zoo, and he took him to a cage where there was an ape. And this man couldn't see it. I mean, an ape in the cage, and he could not see it. So the psychiatrist took him to a statue of an ape, and the man felt it with his eyes closed so that he got a mental picture of it. And when he went back to the cage, he could see the ape.

So our search for liberation from suffering, from our own personal suffering, is the sharpening of this internal seeing. And the Buddha gives us these cues, he gives us these clues as to which way to approach it. It's impermanence—but radical impermanence. It's not that something is changing; it's that something is arising and passing away. Now when we say that something is arising and passing away, we're not talking about the physical world as we know it, or as we don't know it. We're talking about consciousness. Consciousness arising and passing away. And consciousness is just a mirror. But it seems so real to us. That's the problem. It seems so real.

And then there's this whole business of relationship that comes up because of this essential delusion—this constant effort of trying to protect myself. Remember that our fundamental relationship is one of love. So I'm acquiring things so that I can feel safe. I feel so much safer if I have a billion in the bank rather than just a few pounds. And I collect things. I collect friends. It makes me feel safe. I collect objects. That acquisitiveness is really trying to make me feel safe.

Now, when I feel safe, I obviously don't want anybody to disturb me, to disturb this happiness that I've got now from this security. And so the aversion comes. Anybody who's going to upset me is an enemy, whatever it is. And of course, if the enemy's too big, I've got to run for it. So there are your three basic attitudes arising out of that delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear.

And from then, when we act out of that—by the way we think, by the way we speak, and by the way we

act—we're actually creating our ethical creations in this world, and they, of course, have consequences. They not only have consequences outwardly, but they have consequences inwardly. So the more you feel fearful, the more you'll hate. The more you hate, the more you fear your enemy. The paranoia is just there within us. The more you have, the more you're afraid of losing.

So it's really about going beyond that and recognizing that when you look at the spiritual traditions, the people whom we honor, really honor—like Jesus Christ, St. Francis of Assisi—they don't have anything. I mean, I'm a monastic. I'm not supposed to have anything, but I've got a lot. I've got my mobile phone for a start, which I'm very afraid of losing.

So you see, this idea of letting go of something is to be manifest in the way that we actually live. And that brings us back to our ethics.

We've really been around the houses this evening, my goodness. We started off by talking about ethics and the fact that there's a feedback. If you look at your ethics and you begin to behave more beautifully, it has an effect on your general attitude to life, which brings you its insights—that it works. Even if people hate you, at least you yourself are peaceful. I mean, you might be the most peaceful person in the world, full of charisma. Somebody out there is going to want to shoot you. It's just as simple as that.

And there's this other way where we are investigating ourselves, which again brings about a change of attitude and then becomes systemic in the way we think, the way we behave. So that whole process is one of insight and ethics, and you can't separate them. And the original ethical stand was falling in love with ourselves. That's the problem. And it's coming back to that level and really investigating that sense of presence, a sense of self, which is really cutting to the core of the problem. And that's exactly what the Buddha found on that wonderful day.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion. And that by your devotion to insight, practice, and ethical standards, you may be liberated sooner rather than later.

Someone asks a question about enjoyment.

I agree with you entirely. It's not a case of getting rid of enjoyment. It's a case of getting rid of indulgence. Indulgence means that your sense of happiness is now dependent on preparing food, making sure that somebody's going to eat it, making sure that you like it. You see what I mean? There's a whole process of attachment to it whereby you're presuming that when you do this, you're going to feel happy. And that's different from a spontaneous joy that comes up when you are preparing food for preparing's sake.

When you're feeding people just for the sake of feeding people, not to make yourself happy—that's the paradox. The more we do good without thinking of ourselves, the more happiness arises spontaneously and naturally within us. That's the bit about non-attachment.

And in that, which is slightly more difficult, is of course we have to do it for ourselves as well without becoming attached. So preparing food for ourselves, just by ourselves, is to take a joy in that. Now, if there's a sense of loneliness there, that tells you that for you food isn't enjoyable unless somebody else is talking their heads off and eating at the same time. If you can actually sit down and in the same way prepare food very carefully for yourself, for the benefit of your body, and the joy comes up in having treated yourself with kindness—that's love.

But as I say, these distinctions are very close together. And we'll never get rid of the attachment until the essential delusion of self disappears. So you've got to work at it. But at least we can undermine it by recognizing when that indulgence comes in.

For instance, in relationships—when does love turn to control? When does love get confused with control? It's a really essential point. Because at the point of control, the other person is no longer a person; they're an object to feed your needs. So every time you're angry with somebody, bored with them—if they're angry, they're not doing what you want. If you're bored with them, they're not making you laugh anymore. And you go through the whole thing of all these negativities and it's all coming from the point of view of "this person is here to make me happy."

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence, because it's so close to love and enjoyment.

What a drag.

So you can always tell when the indulgence is not being fed. The difficulty is knowing when you're feeding the indulgence because it's so close to love and enjoyment.

What a drag.

Very good.

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