Control and Loss of Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51:43

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa—homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble, and fully self-enlightened one.

So I'm slightly aware that my New Year address is directed at what is known in language teaching as false beginners. They are the ones who used to practice, stopped, and have now returned to the fold. So I have to make a special effort to enthuse you all, especially those, so that this will never happen again. And from this day on, until you slip into the warmth of the grave, you will continue to practice.

As you know, many people come to meditation for various reasons, especially these days with this mindfulness movement. But the spiritual search, I think, begins when there is some sort of existential crisis, whether it's a very small sea or an earth-shattering one. And I think that's really where in spiritual practice you have to put your attention, and the questions come up in various forms such as: Why am I here? Why is this here? This whole universe—what is it here for? Why am I conscious? Why am I conscious of it? All these questions, and worst of all, why am I conscious of it and then I have to die just when I'm getting used to it, just when I start getting old and things happen.

So these questions bring up in us all sorts of emotional reactions. And it's the investigation of that question, really, which is the spiritual quest. So in the Buddha's own terms, in his day, it was this awful idea that he kept coming back. Kept coming back. There's rounds of rebirths. And there seemed to be no escape from it—it was a constant being born and then depending on your karma you ended up either as a dog or worse, and sometimes as a king, but those opportunities were very rare of course. So it was the horror really of this rebirth which was seemingly one of the obsessions of the age.

And in a sense, if you're an annihilationist, that's a fate worse than death. You have to keep coming back. Sisyphus—I can't remember what he did. Does anybody remember what he did? He did something terrible. And his punishment was to roll this boulder up to the top of a hill and then to see it roll back down and then go back down and start again. And that was it. That was his life, you might say, in hell.

So when we think of the spiritual quest, we're really trying to answer these deeper questions. And the Buddha's own quest led him to a particular answer, a particular experience that we call awakening or enlightenment. And from that moment onwards, he said, he didn't suffer. And then, of course, you have to define what he meant by this word *dukkha*. But as far as he was concerned, he always lived in a state of some joyous heart state, whether it was just pure equanimity, contentment. And when he was in relationship, it was either love, compassion, or joy. And remember that compassion is not a sad thing.

Compassion is a joyful state. If compassion leads you to some sort of morose state, then something else has slipped in—perhaps pity or grief—but compassion is the joy that you get when you're helping people, just knowing your limitations, and that help might only be offering them goodwill. You can only do so much.

Today in some of the interviews this whole idea of what can you do—the modern Western koan of: After you've done everything you can do, what can you do? It's very difficult for us to accept that, the limitation of doing. So I always describe it as a ring of power around us. And that's all you can do. You can't go beyond what you can do. And then, of course, you can get other people to do things. That's your influence. Then after that, trying to get beyond that is just frustration and depression and all sorts of things. Burnout.

The whole idea of power, if you consider Tolkien, Lord of the Rings. See if I've got the names right. Frodo, that's right. Frodo has this ring and Sauron—Sauron—he wants this ring. And this is the ring of power. I mean, you can have all sorts of interpretations to Tolkien's story. But for me, this ring of power—and once Sauron had it, he would rule the whole of Middle-earth, which is a horrible idea, as you know. So Frodo doesn't take on the power of that ring. He actually takes it to be destroyed. And in destroying all that sense of power and the sense of control and domination, wins him eternal life. Only because, not because he's upset Sauron and destroyed that potential, but because he himself has let go of all power and all desire for power. See? This is perhaps my own interpretation, you understand, but that's as I see it.

One of the things that the Buddha talks about is this whole idea of a self and what it means and how it comes to be. And when we talk about an existential crisis and we talk about why am I here, what consciousness is, what is it we're talking about? We always talk about me. The sense of me being conscious and me dying. The whole idea of power in its bad sense is to be able to control the world, control our situation, so that me always feels safe. Me is always in charge, in control. And whenever that control slips from us, it's a horror story. And unless you're ready to let go of that desire for power, the wrong desire for power, or rather the desire for wrong power, it just becomes a battle.

People who fight the idea of growing old, fight their situation, their loss. I always think of that—this is years ago now—of the policeman who was paralysed by a criminal. And he couldn't hack it; eventually he committed suicide. He was only paralysed from the waist downwards. He wasn't totally paralysed. But being a sports person and very active, he couldn't let go of that. And therefore it drove him to really seeing his life as useless, meaningless.

So this idea of power, of control, is very much tied up with the self. Now, what does the Buddha do? He makes the mistake of so many of his age—he tries to be happy. And he must have tried at home to be happy and found that the sensual pleasure was somewhat wanting. It became vapid. It didn't have any depth to it. So you have a good meal and that's the end of it. Sex, drugs and rock and roll—they're vapid. And it's that weariness, the weariness which is trying to seek happiness and sensual pleasure. The weariness of it. Just the sheer exhaustion of clubbing every night. You just can't take it anymore.

And then there was this other offering of the age, which was the *jhāna*, the absorption stuff, which you

find in all religions. These beautiful states. Ecstatic. We can get that sort of ecstatic state by doing something extreme. By getting extreme sports and stuff like that. Or getting lost in music. Just for that moment there where we lose a sense of self. And we're totally absorbed into the extremely joyous state. That sort of happiness is again very—it's very fulfilling if it's wholesome, it's very fulfilling, but it passes. So in the end again there's a sort of weariness, and if we compare that to the *jhāna* then we find ourselves in a similar situation.

The *jhāna*, the absorptions are self-generated. You don't need anything outside you. The *mettā* that we do, if you just keep practicing that, you'll see slowly but surely this beautiful state arises in you. I'm sure you've experienced it. And the more you do it, the stronger that state is. And it gets so strong that, as it were, you fall into it and you lose the sense of somebody doing the *mettā*. There is just the lovely state that you're in. It's an absorption. That's why they call it an absorption.

We do it on a much, shall we say, obvious level when you're watching a film. So when you're watching a good film, for that two hours, you're lost. There's not somebody watching the film. There's a loss of that somebody, that self, that self-awareness—there's just the film. And then when you come out, you arrive again. You arise. You say, oh, that was fantastic. And that absorption is a type of happiness and it can become more and more refined as you practice these other more religious forms—prayer, mantra, even coloured circles in Theravāda they have 40 of these particular subjects which can lead you to various depths. But again, it's a happiness which is dependent on conditions. It's a happiness which is dependent on your body, your mind, whatever you're using. It's dependent on somebody giving you food, things like that. It's always dependent. And therefore, you don't have total control. And worse, it comes to an end. You can't sit there forever.

So there was always something which didn't satisfy you. And as you know, he got very good at it. He was invited to teach. But he just didn't hack it. And I presume, although he doesn't say this, one has to interpret it a little bit, that after a while, he had that same sort of weariness. You know, not another *jhāna*. There must have been something unsatisfying about it. Because for the others, for the ones who were following that path, they didn't leave. They didn't say, you know, I'm fed up with this. They were really into it. Just developing these beautiful mental heart states.

And then he goes into another form of practice which was prevalent at the time, which was this self-mortification. And I presume that even then he's practicing *jhāna*, but here the problem was the body itself because it was understood by some at that time, the Jains for instance, that your karma expressed itself in your physicality. Your body was your karma. It was like a physical thing which held on to your soul. And if you could let go of the body, then the soul would rise. Of course you had to work out all the karma that you'd accumulated through past births.

I met a Jain actually the other day. I'd heard about this, but he confirmed it for me. That the Jain saint is the one who finally determines to stop eating. And he says when somebody does that in the Jain

community, he's like divine. I mean, he's suddenly become somebody of enormous importance. And he actually has the courage to let go of this life form and then rise into—his soul to rise into heaven. I don't know, we don't know whether the Buddha believed that particular theory, although the Jain leader was his contemporary, elder contemporary. We can presume it, but at some point he found it also just more suffering. That's what he said—just more suffering. It somehow didn't work for him. Again, we don't know the mental processes that he went through, but he definitely found it wearisome and useless, that's what he calls it—useless. He doesn't say it's unprofitable, he says it's useless. Profitless.

And so that's when he leaves, remember. That's when he leaves. So up until now, we could say that he's trying to steal from heaven, like us all. We're trying to grab something from the eternal life through our own personal effort, through a personal effort of gaining, attaining, controlling. And as you know, he's despairing. He's by the roadside. He wonders what to do. And then he gets this wonderful gift from Sujātā. You remember the rice pudding? Which has amazing effects, as you know. So this vivifies him. And he has this memory, remember, of a childhood where he's watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony, and he recognises that state as a child as being the same as the jhānic states that he was in with an extra component which was that sense of curiosity.

That's the point where he actually becomes self-enlightened. Before that he's just following the paths that the society were offering him and finding them weren't satisfactory. And now he has this insight—instead of trying to grab happiness and trying to hold it, find it, keep it, he now turns upon the suffering and asks the question, why do I suffer? His whole meditation, as it were, turns around on itself. And it's with that new inspiration that he sits. And he seems to have been so inspired by that and seems to have thought of it as, well, there's nothing else but this now. And he makes this great determination not to rise either to crack the problem or die.

So, I mean, I always say, very lucky for him, lucky for us, he cracked it. And in a sense, he opened up the gates, the gate of the deathless, that's what it's called. He opened up the gates to the deathless. And if you think of anything that people do in the world, there's always somebody, there's always somebody who makes it first. You know, somebody climbs Everest and everybody gets up there. Nobody wants to get up there. As soon as it's made available by one human being, it's made available to everybody. So when he opened this gate to the deathless, he opened it for everybody. Anybody who wants to liberate themselves from suffering—it's there to be taken. And fortunately, he had this great ability to teach, which meant that he laid down a very clear path as to how we actually make it. So it wasn't just a theory, it wasn't just an idea, a philosophy. In fact, he wouldn't really rate it as a philosopher at all. He was more of a psychologist, an ethical psychologist. And he laid down a real specific practice, which we term right awareness or *vipass anā* and words like that.

So there's this path that he's laid out. And he centres on a particular mental quality. This quality of desire, which is where—which he calls the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering. Desire is the cause of suffering. He talks about the three avenues—the three perspectives, the three characteristics of existence.

That there is impermanence, everything is impermanent. That there is nothing in the world which is going to ultimately, completely and fully satisfy us. That's the *dukkha*. And that the idea of a self is an illusion. It's not that you don't need the illusion of a self, but it is knowing what the illusion, or better still, the delusion is. So these are the three gates, you might say, or the three avenues of investigation, but the fundamental cause is desire. The psychological fundamental cause is desire.

And this desire, when you think about it, is about power. It's about us wanting those things that are going to make me happy. And having control over them. Whether it's by money or just naked power. And it's about getting rid of all those things that are undermining my happiness. Just annihilating enemies. Anybody whom I don't like. I like to annihilate. Get rid of completely. And then surely I'll be completely happy.

So that's—if you look at desire from the point of view of controlling the environment, controlling our environment, in order to make it something that is making me happy. I'm always seeking this happiness. And of course people define happiness in all sorts of ways. It can be riches, it can be hanging about, it can be sleeping. It doesn't matter how you define happiness, but we're always trying to manipulate the situation in order to make ourselves comfortable and at best, happy. It's about power.

Now that's what he points out as the cause. The cause of suffering is desire. This wrong desire. It's not a wrong desire to want to escape suffering, let's be right in it. The desire is to seek happiness in the sensual world. By which we mean a permanent happiness. The fleeting happinesses of sensual pleasure, the joys of relationship, the joys of nature—fine. But even there, we twist it, trying to hold it, trying to maintain it, trying to squeeze the last pip out of the orange, the last little drop of juice. So it's that, and that's the attachment. Attachment.

So what is attachment? Attachment is this very desire, this very psychological dependency on something over which we're trying to control but which we can't for happiness. It's a really wrong, it's a really painful investment of our energy, a useless investment of our energy. Then you might ask well okay, because I'm still on this existential business. Why am I here? Why am I doing that? Why am I trying to manipulate the world and trying to seek some sort of permanent happiness?

Now when I dig deeper, I find that we come to this essential delusion about the self. The self is an identity. It's an identity. There's no such thing as a self because the identity keeps shifting. So when I was a child, my identity was very much with the body. Three, four, well, up until teenage, I suppose.

I am the body. Then maybe around about teenage, you start being emotion. I am my emotions. I'm identifying with emotions as separate from the body and thought. I am the thinker. I am thought. Who am I if I can't think? And the identity shifts from moment to moment depending on what you're experiencing. So if you happen to be having a cup of tea, then you're a physical self. If you happen to be sitting there musing about your existential crisis, then you're a thought self. If it's emotional, emotional self.

So this self isn't something that exists outside your experience. It is a relationship you're having with the experience. And that relationship is being defined as me. And me.

Now when we sit in meditation, when we sit in *vipassanā*, we bounce out of, we pull ourselves out of that enmeshment and we discover a different me within ourselves that we call the observer, the feeler, the one who knows. And suddenly all those things that before I thought were me become objects to observe, to feel. I'm distancing, I'm pushing out of, I'm lifting into a different orbit within myself.

And it may be that in so doing that, you suddenly realise actually, in that position of the observer, at least for a few moments during every sitting, you are in fact liberated from the body, heart and mind. You are liberated from painful emotions because you're looking at them. It doesn't make them any less painful in themselves, it's just that you're no longer entrapped by them. And you're no longer caught up in all the mentation, the stories that they make the mind develop.

And in that position, you realise that you don't have the power that you thought you had. So the body, the knee begins to hurt. Whether you want it to or not, it just hurts. And if you say, stop hurting, nothing happens. It gets worse. And if you fight it, it gets even worse.

And emotion comes up. You didn't ask for it. It just arose. And there you have it. It might be anxiety. It might be joy for it. It could be something lovely for a change. And it just arises. And you're there. You're watching it. And it's come. And you're feeling it. You know it's there. And if you say, go away, it won't. It'll keep on coming. You can avert your attention, you can leave the meditation room and go for a run or something, but you can't while you're in that state and something arises. You've pulled out of it, you're in a different orbit for want of a better word, but you're actually releasing control. Actually releasing control. You're actually beginning to drop this dreadful ring into the furnace of destruction.

And it's being comfortable with that. It's being able to realise or to see or to experience that actually there is a place where we can find within ourselves that is temporarily liberated from all the stuff that goes on within us. And then you realise that when you re-enter into the psychophysical organism, that it is this very knowing which is, it's within the very knowing that the distortion is to be found.

There's a way of seeing. We're seeing things. We are understanding things in a wrong way. And that's what the problem is. The problem isn't the body. The problem isn't the heart. The problem isn't the mind. It's somehow our engagement in this psychophysical organism which isn't right. Which is warped. There's something wrong with it. And that something wrong with it is the identity with this very psychophysical organism. Because when I say to myself I am Bodhidhamma. I am that, you see. Then it's in this form that I'm trying to seek happiness. See.

And that's what we're always seeking at all times. We're always at all times seeking happiness. Even if it's the happiness of oblivion. Even if you get so fed up with things you launch yourself into the bed and disappear. You're still seeking happiness. You know.

So the process of awakening, the process of enlightening ourselves, is to catch where the warp is, to catch where the distortion is coming. The *vipallāsa* as it's put. *Vipallāsa* means to see things as permanent or to think they can be permanent when they're not, or at least they'll stay similar and they never do. To find, to try and seek happiness in something which is not going to deliver. And to see something substantial which doesn't have any substance. Especially internally, the sense of self. The sense of me.

So when we practise *vipassanā*, which is the core practice, and it's from there that we take awareness into daily life, etc., etc., there's your core practice. In the morning, when you enter into that state, even if it's only for a short time, you're reminding yourself of this higher way of being in the world, which is the observer, the feeler, the knower, the one who knows.

And even though there is even then a distortion because that's also a false sense of self, at least we're telling ourselves every time we do that, we're somehow getting the message across that we're not this physical, this psychophysical organism. That's the message we're constantly telling ourselves. And when we're in the state of the observer, something very strange is happening because there is a knowing that there's a knower.

Now, what's that telling us? It's telling us that this self, this self-awareness is somehow pointing in the right direction. Just like in a mirror, it's pointing in the right direction. It's a sense of that knowing within the mind. But just as the mirror distorts our image, so this sense of the observer is also a distortion. But it's a much better place to be than a physical self, or an emotional self, or a thought self. It's a much wiser place to be.

And what we hope is that in accessing that in the morning, we remind ourselves of this position. It can be a reflection, but actually the doing of it, the doing of it is an experience which stays with us. And the more we do it, the more we become aware of that position of being the observer. This liberates us from entering into delusions which are offered by the body, heart and mind. Or better expressed, which arise because of our identity with the body, heart and mind.

So here in meditation when pain comes, and you see the reaction. You want to move. Why should I suffer this? All that sort of stuff. And you stay with that reaction. The reaction is coming from this self that wants to manipulate the world to make it always comfortable or happy. But if you stay with that, two things are happening. First of all, this reaction begins to die away, so the old habit of trying to control is being undermined. And secondly, you are reinforcing a new identity of being that which is not the body, heart and mind.

And in the same way, when an emotion comes up, it's a nasty one, we don't want to feel it. See, somebody's emailed me about toxic shame. I mean, real heavy shame that goes back to childhood or something. And how destructive it is, you know. And he was saying to me that it was a good job that he did get into drugs, otherwise he would have killed himself. It was so painful. And it's only now that slowly but surely he's able to turn toward this dreadful feeling of shame. Every time he's in company, he feels people can

penetrate him, can see the way he really is, which is, you know.

And to be able to stay with that, you see. So that's undermining this reaction of not wanting. Having control. Trying to manipulate things. It's the growth of patience, the being able to bear, to bear with. And it's also the ability, or should we say, the growing realisation that there is something above the shame. There's something beyond the shame. The observer, the feeler, the knower.

And as an aside to that, something which happens as a consequence, quite naturally, unwittingly you might say, the heart's healing itself. So two things we realise through our meditation practice is that when an emotion catches the mind and creates a story, it's developing itself. I mean you know that. Every time you get angry, somebody says something nasty to you, you repeat it a hundred thousand times to make yourself even more and more angry. And seek true revenge. See? So we know that we have to stop the mind creating stories.

And when an emotion is releasing itself as a physical sensation, as a felt state, it's actually expending its energy. It needs an active act of will to develop. And even when the mind slips away in one of these little stories, there's been a little empowerment there. Even though it's habitual, there's been little empowerment. And if you're not careful, that's why we can spend hours in meditation thinking about how we're going to kill somebody. Or worse. Or worse.

So when you realise that, you come back, you see. And then if we can just stay with an emotional state long enough to see it dissipate, no matter how painful that is, that's when we get the confidence of being able to stay with this stuff. Because then we begin to realise that actually that's the process of healing. That's the setup.

So now we have to return to this essential question as to, you know, why am I here in the first place? I mean, this is the new year, if I can say. So I should be making new resolutions and lifting up my heart of courage and all that, you know, shield and sword and into the fray and all that sort of stuff.

So returning to our question, you know, why are we here? Well, in terms of some sort of theology, in terms of some sort of grand philosophy, the Buddha is characteristically quiet. And I think there are two reasons for this. First of all, once you go beyond personal experience, you're into inference. But secondly, the experience of *Nibbāna* is total and complete. It doesn't have a reason beyond itself.

When we were doing the standing meditation, just being, just drawing our attention into the present moment. And just for one moment letting go of a reason for being, a reason beyond itself. And a future that we have to plan. Planning is also a form of control. I mean, there's good control, remember. I mean, if you've got to go to the dentist, you have to control events to get there on time. You don't want to miss a dental appointment. But just for a moment there, every so often, to just stop. And just be with the moment. Just be with the sensuality of the moment. Bury yourself into the body. Just being here.

And that's where you get this sense of timelessness. So it's the mind that creates time. It's the mind which

creates this idea of movement in time. It's a mental construct. Actually, as we all know, you only exist in this present moment. Which doesn't deny the fact that you've got to plan and all that sort of stuff. But it's just every so often during the day to stop and remind ourselves that there is a different mode that we can enter. Just this pure being.

Just because we're self-aware in that moment, it's still getting the message across. Still getting the message across. That there are two modes. One of being and one of doing. They don't cancel each other out. But if you're always doing, you're missing out on the being. And that's our problem. We're always doing something.

Now when you're just being, there's no control. Because there's nothing to control. You're in the present moment. It arises and passes away. That's it. So there, we're getting a hint of the Buddha mind.

And coming back to the position of the observer, when you're in that state in your meditation, and it's pretty clear to you that you are orbiting, that you've pulled yourself out of the body with its sensations, the heart with its emotions, and the mind with its thoughts and images. When you've been in that state for a while, and you come out of it, and you reflect upon it, just ask yourself, what is inside the observer? What's it made of? Are there any sensations there? Are there any emotions there? Any emotional states at all? Is there any thought there? Thought patterns.

So we're obviously beginning to experience something which is not phenomenal. It's not something which is arising and passing away. And when you've come out of that state, and it's been very clear to you, ask yourself, was it satisfying?

Because the Buddha says, and I shall leave you with this. Those who are mindful are in the presence of *Nib bāna*. In the presence, in the vicinity of it. That's how close we are. It's as though we are looking into it and not being aware of that state. And then you realise why all spiritual practice anyway, in all these traditions, always moves towards silence. It always moves towards some sort of silence.

So another approach is to just develop that taste for calmness, a taste for silence, a taste for non-doing, without letting the mind just go off on its own. Now that position has also got some relationship to what it is that you're experiencing. Whether it's physical, emotional or mental. It has the relationship of non-attachment. Of not grasping, of not wanting to have power. That's the relationship. Because you're watching it, you're investigating it. See?

So now, when we re-enter into the psychophysical organism, you see, and through that into the world of action, we find very slowly that we're actually undermining that whole idea of controlling. We're undermining the idea of trying to manipulate things. And that brings us round to that sense of contentment which is wanting what one has, not always trying to get what one wants.

And you start from there, you see. You start from this is the way it is. Which doesn't undermine potential. It's just that you're starting off from a realistic base before you would have normally tried to manipulate

things. This is the way it is.

So a neighbour of ours, he fell out of bed. And slipped his disc really badly. He was in a wheelchair. And I met his wife, who's a delightful, lively woman. And she's moaning about him. She's saying, you know, I've got to do this and I've got to do that. And then she says this lovely phrase, she says, it shouldn't be like this. And I said, ah. I said, yeah, there we are, you see, that's where the suffering is. That it shouldn't be like this.

I think it's in the film, what's his name, Clint Eastwood, Unforgiven. Yeah? Yeah. And at the end, Clint, he kills them all. And as he dies, this terrible, nasty, sadistic sheriff, can't remember his name, he's a great actor, remember his name? He says, just before he goes, he says, it shouldn't have been like this. How many times do we, you know, in the day say, it shouldn't be like this. It shouldn't rain. I mean, damn it, I've come here on retreat. It should be nice. And she shouldn't cough like that. And what's the meaning of that? Why is the door clicking like that? It's all this business of trying to manipulate, control.

Now, it's not as though understanding this, that it's all going to stop. Oh, if heaven did, only it would. But at least now we're not fooled by it. That's the point, not to be fooled by it. So we know as soon as we hear the phrase, it shouldn't be like this. Aha! So you say, Māra, I see you. That's it. No longer does it have the power to upset our contentment. This is the way it is. It's a lovely little phrase to repeat to ourselves.

And remember that's not the same as resignation. Resignation is a despair. This is the way it is, I can't do anything. This is the way it is, what can be done? It's grounding ourselves in the way it is without coming to a situation, coming to a moment, coming to a relationship with prejudice, expectation. Expectation. Preference. Preference. Preference.

So I've bumped around here and there and all over the place, but I hope that you get this idea of a central control panel called the self that really just wants to be happy. That's all. Just want to be happy. And it's trying to constantly manipulate the situation. Holding on to, grabbing what makes it happy. And pushing away, annihilating. And if it gets too much, run for it. So those are your three main attitudes that arise out of the self. Aggrandisement. Accumulation. Aversion. And fear. Those are your basics. And from out of these three snakes, yes, arise all our miseries.

So it really is beginning to see that in our daily life. Slowly but surely, cutting away, cutting away, cutting away.

Roshi Kennett, who started the Zen order in the West at Throssel Hole Abbey—some of you might know it, lovely place—she talked about the practice of being like a huge granite mountain which you had to shift, and all you had was a little teaspoon.

So, getting across that this is not easy, but we should contemplate on the benefits of our practice and how it's helped us in our lives. And that, in a way, is a sort of self-encouragement, and it makes you want to give a bit more, do a bit more. And this doing is always arising out of that lovely sense of calmness, one of

the factors of enlightenment.

Don't put a time slot on it. An expectation. So remember there's a distinction to be made between hope and expectation. The hope that arises from the practice is something which comes to us because we begin to see, we can perceive that there is an end to suffering. I mean that's what the practice is about. It's about actually perceiving how we can actually become fully liberated. That's the hope.

The expectation is when we put a date on it. Then we've had it. Then there's sheer frustration and despair. So it's not good to think of practice too much in terms of progress, because it's very much up and down.

So this year we might start off with a firm commitment to up the practice a bit. Get up to Satipanya to do a four-week retreat. Why are you all laughing? To get up there and do some extra work, you see. And then next weekend you're drunk. And you wake up and, oh, come on, don't do that. What is it? So it goes up and down. But it's keeping the nose in the right direction. Keeping your nose in the right direction. And very slowly over time one sees the effect of the practice.

But don't put milestones on it. Oh boy, that's wicked. Putting milestones on your practice. "I should be here now. Why have I not been doing this? I've been doing this for thirty years. Why am I not aware all the time?" Thirty-seven years, let me say. "My mind's still going all over the place." See? See? I mean I should be in a state of despair. Anybody should be in this room anyway. But it's a case of just keep, just keep, just keep taking the next step. Taking the next step.

So hopefully tomorrow I'll give you some template that you can work on to reflect upon your life, which you may or may not want to use, and try and build up some sort of resolutions for the year. One, two, not too many. And I've got to work out a little ritual which I would normally do at the stupa at the centre. A burnt offering. So I'll try and work something out with Mark. He'll be the carrier of the flame. And we'll try and organise just a little ritual. Putting little bits of paper into a bowl and setting fire to it. Burnt offerings, burnt offerings.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your renewed commitment and invigoration of the path, reach the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

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