Introduction to Body Awareness and Vipassanā Practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 51:40

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

I'm mindful of the fact that one or two people here know very little about Buddhism, and some who know quite a lot. So I'll try and weave a story that encompasses both, and also talk about the Mahāsi and the technique that we're using for the *vipassanā*.

When we practice meditation, I think we have to be clear about three things. First of all, what does the Buddha mean by right awareness? And then, how do we maintain that sort of awareness against all the hindrances, how the mind wanders off all the time? And what is it we're investigating? What is the process of liberation? What do we mean by that? What does the Buddha mean by delusion?

It's always good to start the story with the Buddha himself. He lived in what you might call an upper middle class - well, I suppose almost nobility. His father was a head man of a group of people, a tribe called the Sakyans, and they were under the local king of Kosala. So all the stories about him being a very rich prince and all that is all later stuff. But he was brought up as a Kshatriya, which is the warrior caste, so he would have spent a lot of time learning how to use swords and spears and also governance. But it's interesting to remember that he would have been illiterate.

Writing as such was coming in, but it was coming in much like it happened in Europe, I believe, in accounts - business people keeping their accounts. But that didn't mean, of course, that the language wasn't highly developed. It was passed on through memory. So even today in Hinduism, the Rig Veda would be learnt off by heart by the Brahmins. And it's interesting how they do it. They first of all teach the child how to pronounce the syllables, even before they know what it means. They pronounce the syllables. And then when they've got it off pat, then they tell them what it means. And only after they know what it means can they begin to philosophize. It's completely the opposite to what we do. We expect people to be philosophers and creative before they've got the basics.

So that's the sort of society he lived in. And of course there were pleasures, there were lots of pleasures. And he would have had lots of free time as opposed to, say, the labourers and the lower castes. The caste system wasn't so rigid in his day. It was becoming so, but not so rigid. And it was to the east of him, out in present-day Calcutta, that sort of area, present-day Bihar, that the Brahmins were getting ascendancy.

Before that, the ruling caste, the warrior caste, would have been considered higher than the Brahmins.

And there would seem to be some sort of disaffection with society going on, much like the hippies of the 70s. And there were lots of men, mainly men, but often their wives and occasionally women, who would leave the homely life, who would leave household life, and live very very basic lives out in the forests and come in for alms round. So all that was established before the Buddha himself set out. There was an established custom of how to live the ascetic life, and it's thought to go back right back to the Mohenjo-daro civilization in the Indus Valley, which somehow disappeared and we can't read any of their stuff.

But when the Aryans came down from the north and conquered all that area, it seems as though some of their yogic practices and whatnot passed into their culture. So it has a very long history, this idea of ascetic practice and building up the powers that the mind has as opposed to the body.

Now at some point he gets fed up with the pleasures and joys of life. They become insipid, vapid, you might say. And because of that emptiness, that's one of the underlying reasons for him leaving his household life. But at a deeper level, it was what we would call an existential crisis. He came to realize that there was, in fact, sickness, ageing and death, and that's where he was headed too. And it's something I think that comes to all of us at the end of youth at some point - that's part of growing up. And normally speaking, people start taking life a bit more seriously in their late twenties. Career, marriage, partnership, all that sort of stuff takes on a more serious quality as they move towards a real involvement in social life, in their life, in the life of society.

So at that time, these things are on his mind, and it comes to a crisis point. So he gets permission from his family, his wife, to shoot off and spend some time as an ascetic. And if - I don't know, I can only presume, this is just a personal presumption, that he was a bit like myself when I left, when I joined the Order. I said to my mother, who wept bitterly - I don't understand why - that I would just go for three years. I was just trying it out. I just needed a bit of space, a bit of time. And then, of course, you get habituated, I suppose.

So anyway, he left with this, shall we say, this deep psychological questioning about life. And it was something that was in the air. In that time, one thing they were trying to escape was rebirth. So it was taken for granted - not everybody, there were materialists - but it was taken for granted that you basically got reborn. And you could be reborn in any realm. You could be reborn as an animal. And the idea of being reborn wasn't all that happy an idea, especially back onto the earth, because it just meant going through the same old routine: work, sickness, ageing and death. So there was a sort of existential fear that ran through the society at that time which fueled this idea of trying to seek something which was beyond that.

And so when the Buddha left, he left already into a set system, a set way of being an ascetic, set customs. Can't call them rules - more like customs. There were regular teachers, very well-known teachers of the time. It was one of the pastimes of the age to turn up at the park, at these lovely parks that they had -

Bamboo Park and so on - especially on a full moon. When in the east, for those of you who have been, as you know, you can actually see colour, it's that bright. And on the full moon they would all go to these parks and listen to the great debates and arguments of these ascetics between each other. And that was one of their entertainments. This is before videos and stuff like that. So he left the home life to join that sort of life.

And the first thing he tries is teachers who teach him how to attain blissful states. All religions have these blissful states. They're attained through prayer, through mantra. And what we discover in that sort of technique, such as the *metta* we did, we can build up a very tremendous ecstasy within ourselves. The heart, although I was saying to you that when we practice *metta*, we don't worry about the emotions. It may be not feeling so good. It may be a bit depressed and whatnot. But eventually, the heart does begin to resonate with the will. And as you keep making these very gentle intentions, the heart resonates more and more. And they become quite internal ecstasies.

Now one of the benefits of being able to develop that sort of thing is that you're happy. You're happy while you're in the absorption and when you come out of it it stays with you. It's not as though that mood suddenly disappears. And when you become an adept at such a thing you can move in and out of that at will. And so you can understand how if you're going to find a way of being blissed out all the time, what do you worry about sex, drugs and rock and roll for? Or food or anything like that? You're quite happy under a tree with your loincloth and you nip around for a bit of food every day and you don't mind what you eat. It's immaterial because all you want to do is just sustain the body so you can get back under your tree.

So that sort of blissful practice was already well developed, and he brought it into his teaching, and we call them the *jhānic* states, the absorptions. And one of those practices is the *metta* we were doing this morning. But the problem is that these things do die out, and that underlying them, because they don't deal with problems, they don't deal with psychological problems, they definitely don't deal with the fears and the aversion of sickness, ageing, and death. And so whenever these things passed away, whenever the old thoughts returned, he realized that actually that wasn't an escape from suffering. It was like icing over dung, you might say, if you'll excuse the expression.

So with that, he left his teachers, who taught him these absorptions. And then he tried, this is the normal chronology that you get taught, but it's not actually absolutely clear which came first. But anyway, he then tried what's known as the ascetic practices. The main one was starvation, was really drawing the body down to its limit, you might say.

So there were two major philosophies which you can see even these days. The first was a materialist philosophy, which basically meant that you die, and that's it, that's the end of it, and you may as well enjoy life as much as you can. And that was the idea of just enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life, but also these absorptions. At least you enjoyed life. Some thought that you had these absorptions, and then you went from rebirth to rebirth, right into higher and higher life, and more subtle levels of peacefulness and joy,

and that was it. Then you disappeared. So there were all sorts of theories about how life progressed.

And on the other side, as opposed to that sort of nihilistic idea, annihilationist idea, so that everybody just annihilated at one point or another, there were those, of course, who believed in an eternal soul. And the soul was trapped in the body. It was trapped by its *kamma*. *Kamma* had become physical. It was your body and it was your attraction to the senses that kept you down at this level. And therefore, if one could let go of this through ascetic practices, then the soul would be released from the body or the desire to be reborn in this realm and it would rise into eternal bliss.

So the Jains were very much into that sort of philosophy. And it's understood that the Buddha actually worked with them. He was his elder contemporary, the Jain leader, the Nigantha. And so the idea was, of course, the main thing was to not give any pleasure to the sense bases, you see. And he seems to have practiced this quite severely. He talks about holding his spine through his stomach. If you have a go at that, you'll see how thin he was.

And at some point, he wakes up and he realizes, actually, this is getting him nowhere either. And in fact, all it is, is more suffering. So he leaves his companions and they're quite disgusted with him because they think he's gone soft or he's lost his courage. Remember that the Jains, the ones that they really praise are the ones who finally stop eating. That's the way they would express their saintliness, just to finally stop eating and die, let go.

So we have this rather dejected young man by the roadside and somebody comes along - we actually know her name, Sujata. It means happy birth - with some offerings for the local god. Although it's a sweet rice thing, but I much prefer to think of it as rice pudding. And when she sees this poor wretch - in the scriptures, of course, they talk about her being bowled over by this god-like figure by the roadside. But, I mean, if he's almost starved himself to death, it can hardly look like that. Anyway, he eats. He has this rice pudding, you see, which of course is a break away from all that ascetic practice. And it revivifies him.

And something happens at that point, which then brings about a turnaround in his practice. And it's because of this that we say he is self-enlightened. Up until now, there's no direction. He remembers his father doing a ploughing ceremony. And he's a child. And he remembers the state that he was in when he's watching his father doing this ploughing ceremony. It's to open the sowing season. And he recognizes in that state the same attentiveness, the same concentration that he's been able to gain through his practice of the absorption, the concentration practice. But there is within that also a question mark. So there's the child observing his father, completely absorbed in what's happening and with the wonder, what is this all about, what's going to happen in his mind.

And it's because of that little memory that he turns the whole process of meditation around upon itself. So instead of trying to find an escape from suffering, trying to find a place where there's no suffering, he turns around upon suffering to ask how suffering is caused in the first place. And it's with that inspiration that he sits under the Bodhi tree, which is the fig tree. It's a great big tree. It's lovely. On a hot day, you

definitely want to sit under it. And it's there that he sits and makes this what we call the great determination.

So there's the great renunciation when he leaves home - everything's greater. And there's the great determination when he sits under the tree. And he determines because he sees no other way of dealing with this existential crisis within himself that he will sit and either he'll crack this problem or he'll die. Now I always say lucky for him and lucky for us it only took six hours according to the legends. And he makes this break, he makes this real breakthrough. And with it there comes this release from what he termed delusion, you see.

So let's go back a bit and just talk about this right awareness. So it's the image of a child. I usually have a picture hanging up, but I've not had time yet to put it up. If you bring the image of a child, usually even up to the age of 10 sometimes, 10, 11, and they become absorbed in something, you notice what their face is like. Their eyes are fixated. If they see a bug or something they've never seen before, they just become completely absorbed. They lose a sense of all their surroundings. You can shout at them, but they're completely absorbed. And their mouth drops. They look gormless. So parents usually tell them to close their mouths or a fly will go in or something. Give them a clip on the back of the head to tell them to wake up. And in so doing, of course, ruin that moment, its potential for full liberation, you see.

So just think of that face, you see. So the fixation of the eyes, the complete absorption, the wonder, the wonder, and the jaw dropping. When the jaw drops, and this is why we say lips together, teeth apart, the jaw's relaxed, this is connected to your thinking. So the thinking stops, see. The thinking stops and there's just the watching, just the observing.

And then when, of course, the child has absorbed what it is they're looking at, the question arises, what is it? And of course they're told that's a beetle or something. And as soon as the beetle is known, the word beetle, it attaches itself to an image in the mind that we call a perception. Every time that child from now on sees a beetle, it just says there's a beetle. It never really looks again. And that's where we are. We never get down to the direct experience of things because we presume the concept we have of it is a direct perception.

So even when you look across at the meadows here and you see a tree, you'll know it's a tree. We see it's a tree, but we don't actually look at the tree in that same original way, the original mind, the beginner's mind of a child. The whole process of *vipassanā* is to get back to that original mind, to get back to that non-conceptual way, non-thinking way, non-energetic way of looking, feeling and experiencing things. And of course very difficult for us because ever since we were children we've been taught the opposite. The more literate, the more visual, the more we depend upon images, TV, all that sort of stuff, the less actually we're in contact with the sense bases as the sense base itself directly experiences something.

So, for instance, if you go to a restaurant and you decide you're going to have a pizza or something, and you have a pizza, you already have an idea of a pizza. So the pizza turns up and it's not so good, it's a very

good pizza. It's immediately compared with all the past pizzas. But this pizza itself is completely original in itself. And there's an inability to accept it as it is. It's always in a state of comparison, which either makes us happy or unhappy.

So you can see how the mind with its concepts and perceptions and history distorts our present experience. Now it's not as though we want to get rid of it. We do need to know when we see something that it is a car, that this is a pizza. It's a case of knowing that there's another way of experiencing things, and that's this direct contact with our sense bases.

So that's what he means by right awareness. Now when we say sense bases, don't forget there's the inner sense base. The mind in Buddhism is also a sense base, and that's when we experience images, it's when we experience our emotions, the inner feelings of the body. All those are internal sense bases, and the mind itself with its perceptions. Just to be able to look at an image, not get involved in it, but just to observe it. So that's also perceiving the mind as it's working.

So this right awareness is quite specific in trying to get us back to this original mind. So you can't, you know, if you're robbing a bank, for instance, you're fully aware and alert, but it's difficult to see you becoming fully liberated. So it's a very specific thing that the Buddha is talking about, this right awareness.

And of course we use the body to get back to that mind. So the breath, the sensation caused by the breath. Even though we use noting words, and we'll come to this a bit later, the noting is trying to reduce thought to a simple concrete word. But our attention isn't on the word, it's not on what we're saying, as I'm doing now. I'm concentrating on what I'm saying. The attention is on what the feeling is, the sensations which are arising in the body. I'm trying to abstract, I'm trying to pull this intuitive intelligence out of its confusion with thoughts and images.

Now then we come across all these things that mess us about, and I'll be talking about that a bit more in depth tomorrow. But you can split them quite quickly into two different. One of them excites us. And one of them sends us asleep.

So all those that excite us. Things that we want. That bring up a certain sense of joy in the heart. Holidays. And all the rest of it. There's all the aversions. And the little petty irritations. And hatreds. And plannings of murder. And all that sort of stuff. Then there's all this general restlessness, the mind just full of energy thinking about this and that. Sometimes it feels that you're going mad because the mind just won't stop. So this is just the energy in the whole process of thinking.

There's all this stuff around guilt and shame, remorse, all that sort of stuff. And there's doubt too. Doubt in the sense of doubting whether the teaching is really for me and all that sort of stuff. Doubt in the teacher, heaven forbid. And there's a deeper doubt in myself. Especially you might look around sometimes, but if you're sitting there in an absolutely wonderful posture, you think oh I can't do this. And that doubt is quite pernicious. Be careful with doubt. I'll talk about that in more detail tomorrow. It comes from often a fear

of failure. It's often driven by fear.

So when we find ourselves, the mind is caught up in that, we find ourselves caught up in it, and there's this language going on, and these emotions are growing. So make sure that you're very clear. If you pull out of it, as it were, and you point to it, you say, well, that's aversion. That's planning. And that's doubt and that's guilt and all that sort of stuff. And what you're doing is you are acknowledging the mental state that's driving it, the attitude that's underneath it.

So don't be concerned with the story at all. It might be here you might actually have a real problem back at home, and it's no good figuring it out here because while you're here everything's changing out there. The problem might have disappeared. If you really convince yourself that you can't do anything about your present life while you're here, then it stops the mind wandering and it stops the mind attaching to something thinking that you can work something out. It's much better to use this time to let those thoughts disappear and to enter a clarity.

Often when things that are disturbing us or upsetting us, we don't realise that our thinking process is being clouded, it's being distorted by the emotional value that we put on it, the fear, the anxiety, the anger, all that sort of stuff. When all that dies down, we can normally see quite clearly how to bring an end to the problem. Not always. Sometimes these things have their own way of working out.

So the storyline is just to be let go. Don't concern yourself with the story at all. And you won't concern yourself with the story when you realize that it's through the stories that these emotions build themselves up. So if you want to get depressed, really start thinking depressing thoughts. Purposefully sit there thinking how depressing life is. And then don't be surprised that you end up feeling really suicidal.

So once you realise that, that thinking, when it's attached to a negative emotion, is pernicious. So then you make the effort, you come off it, come off it, and you sit within the heart, you sit within the emotional state.

And the other one is, of course, sleepiness and doziness. So, I mean, we've already said that. There's probably some real imbalance in sleep when you come. It might take two or three days to work that out. But then afterwards, remember that dullness and lethargy are conditionings within us that we've developed. Often, for instance, when you're fed up, you just sit in a chair and fall asleep. Hopefully you wake up feeling a bit better. And then there's all that dozing away in bed, Sunday morning, that subliminal state for hours on end. Can't be bothered to get up.

So all those things are developing within us, this idea that oblivion is a beautiful place to be in. And in a sense it is. There's no suffering in oblivion. It's just that unfortunately we keep waking up. And then we find that actually we're dozy and muzzy headed even when we don't want to be. So again, it's this case of making it determined not to fall into that state, but to make that state something to investigate.

So you're investigating. Remember, this is not a historical investigation. It's not a psychotherapeutic

investigation. It has nothing to do with psychotherapy. This is a direct contact with your mental state. And of course, what you realize is that by allowing these mental states to manifest, these conditionings to manifest, they're actually burning themselves out. And there's your therapy. It's much cheaper. It's much harder because you've got to sit with this stuff. But if you can spend the time, then you'll find it quite purifying. Purification of the heart is part of the process.

So don't be afraid. Don't be surprised, especially those who are new to this, that emotions come up quite strongly because often we know that we're anxious, but we've never really felt it. We've always put our attention somewhere else. We're trying to find a solution. We're gently running away from it. It's the fear of fear that's causing this underlying panic. But actually, when you turn round upon the anxiety and sit with it, well, it can come up with quite a really heavy force.

Same with all these things. Some old grief, some anger, depression. All these have quite a lot of power behind them. And often when we come to sit for the first time, but even all the way through the spiritual life, you'll find that you're opening up to it. So don't be surprised to find that it's much stronger than you thought it was. But if you just stay with it, just stay with it. And this idea, this affectionate awareness, affectionate awareness, to embrace it with loving kindness. So, ah, there's my lovely depression again. And that undermines your reaction to it. And it's the reaction which is causing the problem.

So again, we'll talk about that a little later when we come to discuss dependent origination, which is the Buddha's teaching on our psychology. That's what we chant in the morning.

So that's just in brief. When it comes to physical pain, remember we're not trying to defeat pain. For the most part, you won't get the better of it. Pain will get the better of us. That's not the point. The point is to recognize our relationship to pain. So physical pain in the knees or some feelings of nausea or headache or backache or stomachache, the whole gamut of human misery. Our job is to recognize how we're relating to it. And how when we're averse to it and pushing it away, that's where the suffering starts. And we're trying to find a way of being equanimous with it, of being at ease with it, being calm with it.

And that means opening up to it too. And of course when it gets too much. When it just becomes a point where you're struggling against it. Where it's just silly. Then you change posture. But when you do change posture. Or you stand up or do anything. Really note. Really be aware of that transition. How one minute there's pain. And there's this reaction to it. The aversion to it. And how once you make an intention. Intending to move. And you move slowly. How the physical part of that experience begins to soften off and almost disappear into a neutral position, a neutral state, and how the heart responds also. How it becomes calm again.

So what we're seeing there is this connection between the body and mind, how the one is intimately connected to the other, how one reacts off the other. When you're angry, the body gets hot, gets restless, it feels awful sometimes. When there's pain in the body, the mind reacts. When we say mind, by the way, it's just our language. Heart-mind. We've split them up, really, ever since the so-called enlightenment, which

has had its benefits. But in the East, you'll still see people pointing to their hearts when they say, I think. Not looking into their heads.

So the heart responds when I say heart I mean just the emotional life, how the heart responds to pain. So you can see this connection that there are two different systems going on here. There's a system within the body itself, the cellular life and the way that we experience life through the body, and there's the heart which is an emotional mental thing going on, and then there's these much finer things going on, these thoughts and images.

And it's catching that process and seeing that it is interconnected, but there are three different things going on all the time. And how they relate, interrelate. These are beginning to deconstruct our experience. And that's really the basic technique the Buddha uses. To deconstruct, and to keep asking the question, well, who am I? Or what am I? Am I just made up of these parts? Is there anything within all these parts that is solid, that is stable, that doesn't move, doesn't change?

And of course that brings us now to the point of what is it we're investigating. So we're investigating these three characteristics of existence, as they're called. The first one is impermanence. And, I mean, if you ask anybody in the street, you know, if you say to somebody, oh, everything changes, well, they wouldn't be surprised by that. I mean, everybody's aware that things change. But at a more subtle level, are we aware of I am changing? This I, this sense of self, how it arises and passes away. Do we think it's permanent?

I mean, where's it gone when you're asleep? And in the morning you wake up and here I am again. So it's not always there, is it? So that can't be permanent. The sense of self.

So, this impermanence. The mind is very good at creating continuity. When we listen to music, we're actually only hearing one note at a time. Or one section of note at a time. And yet the mind gives us the impression of hearing music as a flow. It's a bit like the old films with the, what do you call them, what do you call those things? You know the old films with the, what's the word? Zoe Troops? Sorry? Zoe Troops. No, I don't know. No, the projector. What's the word for it? With the frames. What is it called? Anyway, if you play it, if there's a speed of something like 25 per second or something, it gives us the idea of continuity. But when we slow that down, of course, it's just one section after the other.

And that's what the Buddha's talking about. In fact, we're although we have this impression of living in a continuous form, actually, as you look more and more closely, more and more closely, you'll see it's stroboscopic. It's actually this and then nothing, and this and then nothing. The mind is very clever at creating continuity for us. And this continuity gives us a feeling of substance, that I am real. This sense of me is actually real, something which sustains, it's an entity, and somehow independent of the universe.

The sense of I detaches itself from everything around itself, even parts of the body at times, and gets the feeling that, well, I can do my own thing in my own way in my own time. And that feeling of something substantial depends upon this sense of continuity.

That's why people have nervous breakdowns when their idea of themselves suddenly slips from under their feet. It could be a loss of their work. I am, you finish that sentence. You put the finish on that, then you'll see where your delusion is. I am a nurse. I am a decorator. When you can't finish it off, when the job's gone, who am I? And that leads some people to real despair. And that's on top of the real, what we call the real suffering of loss of income, etc, etc. It's compounded by that loss of identity. And then all these other identities that we have, our political identity, our social identity, our family identity.

So when you complete that, every time you complete that I am something, you'll know that in there there's going to be the potential of suffering because the identity doesn't have any substance.

When the Buddha, nowhere in the scriptures by the way does the Buddha say there is no self, but you have to understand what the Buddha meant by a self. The self, the *attā* could be translated into our language as a soul, but then you've got to be careful because when we use words that come from a Western tradition, it gives us all sorts of ideas. But generally speaking, most people who were eternalists, that's what they were called, would have some idea of a soul which was eternal, which was completely happy, and so on and so forth, whatever constitutes a soul.

So all the Buddha's saying is, well, if this soul exists, where is it?

If it's eternal then it obviously can't change. If it's changing then whatever it was is now gone, so there's obviously some sort of process whereby it may disappear. So looking at change, looking at impermanence, we're always questioning: well, is that, if that's impermanent, not me? So the connection between continuity and a feeling of substance.

The connection between things being impermanent, unreliable, and the sense of self being undermined are intimately connected. Now, it's because of the sense of self that we define ourselves as human beings. Now, conventionally, of course, that's perfectly true. But what it does is it makes us seek happiness in this form.

And that manifests as acquisitiveness, greed in its more moral form. But the more you have, the more you feel substantial. You feel far more safe if you have a million pounds in the bank than if you only have ten. If you have lots of friends, you feel much more substantial than being on your own, being lonely. You feel much more substantial if you have power and you can do things, and then you find yourself powerless.

So all these things, all this feeling of substantiality, of something, of me, me, something real, is based upon what I've accumulated. Now, of course, what I've accumulated other people want. And therefore anybody who undermines my accumulation has to be my enemy. So aversion arises naturally. And if the enemy is a bit bigger than me, then of course I've got to run for it. So fear arises naturally.

So these three attitudes are the undercurrent of our lives because of a delusion as to who we are: acquisitiveness, greed, aversion and fear. And from that all the gamut of human misery arises. All the future unethical actions that we commit and the guilt and the remorse. Misery, misery all the way.

So our process is twofold, and again I'll try to speak more about that at some future time. It's both this understanding, this investigation of who we really are, or what we really are, and a process of purification. Because our relationship, our relationship to each other, to the world, to anything—our relationship is our ethics. The way we relate is the way we are either ethical or unethical. So it's all connected. It's all connected. And so the process of purification is part and parcel of the path. And that's the hard bit of the practice.

I just wanted to say something just about the Mahasi. So the Mahasi was a teacher last century, which was a great revival of Buddhist practice. It had gone sort of dead by the end of the 19th century, so it's said anyway. But during the last century, many teachers arose, really very great teachers. And both in the Tibetan and in the Chinese and in Japanese tradition, all these traditions, suddenly these very great teachers arose. And in the Theravada tradition, the Mahasi was definitely one of those.

There's a book written by Jack Cornfield, which used to be called Living Buddhist Masters, but they're all dead now, apart from one. So it's been retitled. And in it, there are, I think, about 10 or 11 masters whom he interviewed, all of whom had a system through which they would get across the teachings of the Buddha. Two of them have become, maybe three, have become very regular in the West.

The one is taught more famously by Goenkaji, who died recently, which is one system of vipassanā. The more generalized system is very simple: just watch the breath and whatever arises and passes away. And in that sense it's very close to Zen. But the other system is by the Mahasi. And whichever Buddhist meditation center you go to, if you see people walking slowly then they've been infected with the Mahasi technique. And virtually all the teachers in the Theravada tradition would have practiced in the Mahasi tradition and probably mixed it with other things. Here I try to keep it fairly close to its original form.

And there are two parts to the system without going into great detail. First of all, this noting that we've practiced. And the idea there, as we've said, is to reduce the thinking mind to a single point. It also has the ability to make us recognize what's going on—to really acknowledge what it is that's happening in the body, heart and mind. And it has this added addition, added benefit that in pointing at something, you're actually recognizing it's not you. If it's an object, how can it be the subject? How can the perceiver be the perceived? How can the knower be the known? And that separation is part of the process of liberation from this deep delusion as to who we are, or what we are.

So it's something that you might want to really develop while you're here. And in a classic Mahasi meditation, which we do for the rest of the year, it's done all the time. You don't have a break from it. As soon as you wake up, you're noting, and you keep on noting until you fall asleep.

The other thing is going slow, stopping, stopping and going slow. So going back to the old films, but we know from these nature programs when they take pictures of, say, I mean, the one I always remember is the frog and the way it catches a fly. And because they can speed up the action of the camera these days, they can really slow it all down and you can see the action perfectly, how it does it. You may be surprised

to know that the fly is caught underneath the tongue. Did you really know that? And was it necessary to know it? But the important thing is that that could not be seen unless the whole process had been slowed down.

So it's the same with us. The slower we go, the more we'll see. Just in the same way as either driving through the countryside, cycling through it, or walking through it. The slower you go, the more you see. So really get this feeling that there's plenty of time to do things.

Opening a door. So this is the last little example I'll leave you with. Closing doors here is part of the fire regulations. But for us, it's a much deeper practice. It's about our existential understandings.

Remember that the person who stands on one side of the room, by the time they've gone out to the door, have changed. Even in that small moment, whoever was standing there and now is standing here has changed. It might not be particularly perceptible, but there must have been a change.

So as you approach the door, stand for a moment. You can just stop for a moment and then intending to open. And as your arm stretches out, stretching, stretching, as your fingers touch the handle, you get the feel of it. The feel of the metal. Touching, touching. And as you press the handle, be in communication with the spring. Neither too much nor too little. In perfect communication with the spring. And then pulling as you open the door. And then stepping and so on and so forth. And then when you've closed the door, one moment of stopping. And then the next intention.

Now sometimes you can't do it because people are waiting. But whenever you can, really get into that habit of stopping as many times as you can during the day and just get into that state of just being and seeing the next intention. And remember that the importance of intentions in Buddhism is that all our conditionings begin with an intention. It's when we empower an intention that we produce a habit. And when we have a compendium of habits, we have a personality. Once you have a personality, your destiny is before you, because your habits drive you in a certain way.

So becoming aware of our habits and knowing which habits we want to develop and which habits we want to get rid of is also part of our practice. And one important spiritual practice is to stop and be in that state of just being for a change.

So we've had a quick look through the Buddha's life and came to see that because of the memory, the child's face—see if you can image that before you sit—can be a powerful reminder. And that his liberation from suffering brought about these understandings. And, lucky for us, a way of teaching it. We talk about Paccheka Buddhas, Buddhas, private Buddhas, people who've become liberated, but don't leave a dispensation. Either they don't teach or the opportunity wasn't there, who knows? So one of the gifts of this particular person, the Siddhartha Gautama, was that he left a systematic way of achieving the end of suffering.

And then we talked about the hindrances, which we'll go into more deeply tomorrow, and how, generally

speaking, how to approach them. And the basic instruction, of course, is to come off the story and stay in the body, stay with the feelings. And then we talked about the three characteristics: sense of impermanence, sense of not self, and the process of desire. We didn't say much about that but we'll cover it in more detail tomorrow.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you by your fierce determination achieve full liberation sooner rather than later.

Sādhu. Sādhu. Sādhu.

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