Right Relationship

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 42:39

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

I just thought I'd continue that theme of relationship. Normally at Christmas I do the *paramis*, the ten perfections. The perfections were — it translates to the word *parama*, which means the other shore. It's what takes you to the other shore. They were a later collection of what the commentaries thought was important about the Buddha's teachings.

But just to try and put it in, I'll just speak them and then you can see what they are. So there's *dana*, there's giving, there's morality. There's renunciation. There's wisdom, which is a mental virtue. Energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity. So those are the ten that were chosen by the wise ones out of the Buddhist teachings. And as you know, the Mahayana only have six, so that makes us much more superior.

Just to talk about relationships. So, remember that we were trying to say last night that there's a part of the Buddha's teachings about insights, about actually understanding who and what we are and how we create suffering. But the other part is how it expresses itself in the world through our relationships.

Occasionally when I watch these videos on TED, have you come across TED? It's a website that has lots of talks by experts. Some are very well, I like them. But these people who are into positive psychology, they come across this word connections. That's their way of expressing relationship, which to me is really just about reducing it to some sort of communication. Because academics will always try to find another word on the presumption that they're coming up with something remarkably new. It's quite difficult to use ordinary words like relationship.

So the fundamental relationship that the Buddhas talk about, and which is throughout the East, is *ahimsa*, no harm. And this was variously translated. So the Jains, as you know, thought that when you did harm, even if you didn't mean it, you were going to get your comeuppance. So he basically avoided stepping on ants. They'd come back and bite you in the bum or something. And you see them, brushing their way before they take a step as a very great sensitivity to the amount of harm we can do just because either we're not aware of it or we don't want to be aware of it. It's just ignorance, is it?

But from the Buddha's point of view, that wasn't really the problem. His problem was always to do with how we create suffering for ourselves. And therefore it was an internal thing. And he brought it down to

this whole business of intention, empowering an intention. So when we empower intention, remember, you create a habit. An action — the usual progression. An intention, an action, a habit, a personality, and a destiny. That's the sort of trajectory. So our personalities are just these combination of habits.

And it's really recognizing what a habit's doing, if it's doing any harm, then to undermine it, to not go with those particular intentions. But our inner intentional life expresses itself outwardly in obvious ways in what we do, in more subtle ways in body language. And this immediately creates a connection, to use that wonderful word. So you're establishing a relationship.

And the relationships are telling us what we're giving out in the world, even when we're not actually fully aware of it. People with passive aggression, where the person's obviously manifesting aggression, but when you say they're angry, they say, not me, I never get angry. And it's that sort of inability to see ourselves as we are, even in relationship. But when something happens in a relationship, it's mirroring something back to us. Of course, you've always got to take into consideration that the other person's doing the same.

So that's another thing we say, isn't it, that when two people meet, there are six people there. There's me as I see myself, there's me as you see me, and there's me as I really am. And the same applies to you. So in this sort of web of delusion, it's very difficult to work out how or why things go wrong.

But in terms of the Buddha's teachings, at the root of this problem lies this acquisitiveness, this desire, and deeper than that, this sort of sense of thirst, of lack. Other writers use that word, lack. And in order to undermine that, we practice certain things that cut deep into that business of finding safety, finding happiness in acquisition. And that's the process of renunciation.

So again, I'm sure you all know the distinction that's often made between renunciation and mortification. So mortification was based on some idea that the soul was held down by the heaviness of the body. You get it in Christian understanding too, don't you? If the eye offends you, pluck it out. So people often believe it's the body at fault. Sex is at fault. Our sexual powers are what's evil, not the way we use them. That's the devil drawing us down into the pleasures of life.

So the idea was, well, one idea was at that time, that as you undermined the pleasures of the body, the soul released itself. And you often get that sort of self-mortification in other religions too. The Buddha saw that as just more suffering. But he didn't give up the idea of renunciation, you see. It shifted, the definition shifted, and it shifted to giving something up to see where the attachment was. It's as simple as that.

So our fast, depending on what came up for you in the fast, would show you at times your attachment to certain patterns of behavior, you see. Now that would be a sort of negative use of renunciation. In other words, you're positively giving something up in order to see where your attachment is.

So, for instance, we might disguise our loneliness — everybody feels lonely at some time or other — by distracting ourselves, watching TV, listening to radio, always having some input, so we're never actually in

contact with the inner person. And then when you go into a silence and there's nothing there and you're not distracting the mind, then suddenly you're on your own, you see. And in that oneness, there's a sort of feeling of being abandoned, unloved. Nobody loves me. How could they? I'm horrible. And it's getting in touch with that nasty feeling of loneliness and unlovedness.

But, of course, we would do it in order to get in touch with it, to feel it, to actually begin to explore that feeling and find out where its basis was, where it's coming from. And we also know that in that exploration, that malevolent energy that we've created through attachment — we have defined love as how much another person can fulfill our needs. That's what we understand love to be. So when there's nobody there to fulfill our needs, then of course I'm completely unloved. I mean, no Christmas present. I don't get any more Christmas presents.

So when we cut deep into that, and when we say cut deep into it, we're not trying to understand it intellectually. See, then that takes you off somewhere else. Cutting deep means going right into the pain of loneliness. Take that as an example. Then, of course, we find that it begins to transform. The transformation happens quite naturally. It can happen very suddenly. Suddenly you find it's gone and you're perfectly happy with yourself and you've discovered solitude.

Other times it sort of fades out, but there's a sort of a murky sort of stuff there and not going anywhere. But even so, some of that energy is in the process of transforming, of moving to the upper. In fact, I'm trying to use this new word, sublimating. It just, there's no in-between state, it goes from one state to the other.

So that's the negative, to use that word, use of renunciation. We're trying to find out where we're stuck, where we're holding on to things, trying to let go of things, you see.

But any time we behave from the heart of love, there must be some form of renunciation. And the Buddha points this out in *dana*. That's one of his main teachings, *dana*, which is generosity. Whenever he's talking to lay people, he always starts with *dana*. And he points out that anybody can be generous, even a thief. Like after they've stolen your money, they can give it to somebody else who's in need. Or Robin Hood.

So, for generosity, it comes even before *sila*, which means these five basic rules of no harm that we chant every morning. It's even before that. You can be a really ugly, terrible person, but still be kind to your dog and give it biscuits when it's hungry. So that's the easiest one to generate.

Now, of course, every time you're generous, you must be giving something up for the benefit of somebody else. So just in that process, there is a process of renunciation, and renunciation here, not feeding into myself, into my selfish needs, and giving it up for somebody else.

And so one of the things, of course, that excites, and this is the little matrix that sort of spins around, are these three things. What makes generosity very easy, at least to practice, is developing gratitude. I remember once reading Meister Eckhart, 13th century mystic, who said that if the whole of your life you

said thank you, that would be enough. I mean, that was his. That's how important he felt this attitude of gratitude was, thankfulness.

I think it's one of the nice things of America that they have that Thanksgiving Day. I think we have one, don't we? Doesn't the Church of England have an autumn Thanksgiving, doesn't it? Is that what it is? When they collect all the stuff for harvest. Harvest festival, isn't it? Is that what you said? Harvest? Oh, sorry, I thought you said hog. Don't ask me why. You said harvest, I heard hog. You see how wars start.

In fact, it reminds me of a lovely moment in the car with my family when I was driving somewhere. And my mother was in a bit of a little depressed, angry little mood. And she was sat at the back glum. My father was saying something. He was a bit high and being jolly. And he said, oh, come on, Rosa, cheer up. And she said, oh, well, you shut up. That was brilliant.

So this little virtuous circle of gratitude, when you think about just what we've received from society. I remember somebody grumbling to me once that they didn't have any children, she didn't have any children, and she didn't know why she paid taxes so that other children could be educated. She found that absolutely obnoxious.

So when you begin to realize that actually a lot of our education has been given to us by the generous taxation of other people. And it's just things like that and things that we take for granted because of our social system. Doctors, the NHS, I mean, there's all sorts of things which we presume now, we don't see them as something which is gifted to us. Not that we don't pay our taxes, but...

So, gratitude enlivens this idea of generosity. And as soon as we give something of time or of wealth, we must be giving it away from ourselves. We must be giving something up. And in a sense, there are various degrees, as you know, of generosity.

I mean, at Christmas, people swap gifts. So that's what kings do. When they meet, they swap gifts. It's just a friendship thing. It's a social nicety, you might say. But it has a purpose. But it's difficult to call it generosity, because if your lump of cheese didn't turn up, you'd be very upset, because you've gone and bought them another different type of cheese. So it's that sort of swapping of things, which is just a social nicety.

But when it comes to real generosity, you know that you are being generous when in a sense what you're giving actually is pushing the boundaries of what you want to give without of course harming yourself. I mean one doesn't want to give all one's wealth away and then end up on the streets. There's a lovely story of St. Francis, one of his monks or friars, brothers, taking this business of complete poverty as a standard, met somebody who needed clothes. So he gave him his robe and he came back naked. And so Francis had to make a rule that you can give everything away apart from your robe. There's a certain sort of, we have to use our common sense.

But it's when you give of time, you see, give of time, that you know that when that boundary is being

pushed, that actually you are truly beginning to renounce something.

So I was just talking to my aunt there, and my aunt said — she belongs to that old school, she's middle eighties or something. And she was telling me that when Uncle John got sick, he was very old, she never went to bed for two years. She sat in a chair. One day he got up, he had a little stroke and at night he'd be disoriented. So one night she caught him trying to get out of the window and this really freaked her. So what she did was she put her armchair next to the window and sat there for two years, never went to bed. And she would amuse herself by listening to the radio and knitting and doing all sorts of stuff just for fear that he'd be sleepwalking and do something stupid. And it ruined her sleep pattern, which she's never particularly regained.

And I'm just thinking, well, I wonder if I would do that then. I'd probably just chain them to the bed. put a manacle on their foot. So you've got these different ideas of generosity. And that was her, she felt that was her duty. That was her — she belongs to that age group, which talks about duty, not rights, about responsibility rather than rights, my rights.

So this generosity, of course, you can expand that into really all sorts of areas. So one of them, and it's funny, it's not actually in — I don't know why it's not in the Ten Perfections, it's, I think, presumed in the word love. Because when we chant the loving-kindness discourse, you can see that the Buddha is giving it a very wide meaning of just a loving relationship, which includes both compassion and joy.

So when something comes up which demands us to help somebody who is in need, then the generosity manifests as compassion. So it's the same when somebody's rejoicing over something. So to rejoice with them, to be happy for them, is also an act of generosity. Even more so if you feel absolutely miserable and the world's gone completely wrong for you, but you're able to put that to the side and rejoice with the person who's being happy. That's also an act of generosity.

So generosity is, in the widest sense of the term, is giving of oneself, you see. Emptying, sort of giving oneself, emptying oneself towards another. It's very beautiful how the Buddha talks about his relationship to the people he teaches. He says, whatever a teacher can do for his pupils, I have done for you, out of *anu kampa*. *Anukampa* means to move towards somebody, you see. The word that most you know will be *karu na*, which is compassion. But the word he uses, *anukampa*, is to move towards somebody. So when you see somebody who's in need, you move towards them.

And it was one of the things on his big doubt, wasn't it? The great doubt, you see. So remember that in the great doubt when Mara arose and said, who the hell are you to try and become liberated from all suffering? You've been around everybody, everybody, and nobody's made it. And here, you're like... Where's this ego thing coming from, this pride? And it's when he touches the earth and the earth goddess arises. And she defends him by saying, because of his past lives, perfecting the virtue of generosity.

So what does this mean? It means that he saw that what he was doing wasn't just for himself, it was for all

beings. And that gave him the courage to withstand the doubt, the inner doubt as to what was he doing this for? This is ridiculous. And that perfection of generosity was basically the — if you want interpretation of that story is, that was the backbone of his effort.

That he wasn't just a matter of me trying to liberate myself from suffering, but also remembering that, you know, probably remembered his own family and his son and all that sort of stuff. And then from then, all his friends and people like that. And it must have occurred to him that if he can crack this problem, then he's cracked it for everybody.

So that gives your effort a meaningfulness which is just beyond yourself, doesn't it? I mean, if you're doing something for somebody else, for yourself, but also for somebody else, it gives it a much deeper meaning.

And if we were to talk about happinesses, you can talk about three sort of levels. You know, one is the ordinary sensual happiness, which is fleeting and all that, but it's a happiness, you know, physical happiness. It can also be intellectual, artistic, even the joys of the practice, you know, when some peace arises very occasionally, then that's a... That is a bit of transient joy and to be enjoyed.

And then there's that type of joy where you get lost in it. I think, what's his name? Aristotle called it eudaimonia. And it's when you get lost. It's when you lose the self in something, like a DVD, you see. And then you come out of it and suddenly you're there again. And during that moment, you've been perfectly happy. You've not been self-aware, but you have been perfectly happy. And then you come out of it and it's gone, you see. And it's catching that gone-ness that brings up this idea of not getting attached to something that you've become so involved in for happiness.

But what makes people really, really deeply happy, which has nothing to do really with transient emotions, because they arise and pass away, and always sense your pleasure, is meaningfulness. And when that meaningfulness goes, you have despair. So that's why I say people who lose meaningfulness in their lives, are really on the point of despair. And there were these soldiers who commit suicide after war and whatnot, for whatever reason, psychologically. But seemingly, they all commit suicide because at some point, they despair. They despair, you see.

And I had a woman phone me up just the other day, you see, in a dreadful state, just at the point of despair, you see, despair, just when you give up hope. And, of course, that's the sign, isn't it, on Dante's hell, you know, abandon all hope you who enter here.

So this idea of generosity has this very deep way of connecting us. And it's only then that our lives seem to take on a much deeper meaning. And in that meaning, that connectedness, that very deep sort of relationship, that is really love at its deepest level, isn't it? And when that's extended from human beings to animals and nature and the world and the cosmos and all that, then you suddenly find yourself in this lovely place of being interconnected. I mean, that's what it means, isn't it? And it comes about through generosity. It comes about through giving, compassion. It doesn't come about because you've thought

about it and you've written an essay on interconnectedness. No. It actually comes about just because you've made that effort to give of yourself into that huge sort of matrix.

And you can even see some of the other ones. So *sīla*, I mean, that's the dark side. You know, that's why we say you shouldn't kill and all that sort of stuff. And take what's not freely given and all those things. negative things of not to do that, not to do that. And I think you'll find that every time you are behaving unethically and even in the smallest, simplest, silly way that creates little qualms in the mind, there'll be something against one of those five. The whole rule of the Vinaya, apart from those that are specific to little rules and regulations, are all around these five basic rules. I mean, they're fundamental, aren't they, to our society, fundamental to our relationship.

So, in correcting all the negative stuff that we do on those sides, anger, usual stuff, anger, you know, being callous, little sharp words that we might say to people. By correcting all that, you see, that is also to be seen as a generous act, you see, because you're giving up this inner desire to poke somebody in the eye, which can be very pleasurable. That's sīla. Renunciation wisdom.

Patience, you see. Patience is another one. Now the Buddha talks about a more sort of, what would you call it? I'm trying to think of another word apart from negative. It's not negative. It's just the other side of the more positive language. Where the Buddha talks about it as the greatest form of ascetic practice.

So what does he mean by ascetic practice? He means, you know, bearing with suffering. So the self-mortificator, you know, starves themselves, sits next to fires for the heat, stands in the river Ganges for hours on end so the kamma is washed away. And there's all sorts of wonderful ascetic practices. There was even a Christian saint, somebody of, I can't remember his name now, but he sat on a pillar. He was up there all his life. And that was it. He lived on the top of this pillar. So these are things that probably came from the East. And you'll still see in India ascetics who've kept their arm up in the air and it's withered. You know, I mean, I've seen that myself. You know, because of some reasons. I mean, they have reasons for doing these things.

So what he means by aesthetic practice is that, is to bear with, patient forbearance. And of course, it begins inward, doesn't it? Because all this stuff comes up and we've just got to patiently bear with these emotional states that come up within ourselves. But they're the same states that we see in other people. There's nothing that separates us apart from the stories. Everybody has fear. Everybody has depression, all that sort of stuff. But the stories are all different. They're all different dramas. But fundamentally, we've all got these same experiences of life.

And bearing with somebody who's annoying us is an act of generosity, isn't it? You're sort of taking it on. Of course, you don't want to be abused by them, because that's another thing. When you talk about love and whatnot, people get confused that you have to give, give, give, even though you're being throttled. Give of your neck. I mean, there's a limit, you know, like as soon as the person's hurting you, then of course there's a different moral comes in where your love has lost its... has lost its connection with you

personally.

See, it's no good giving, giving, giving, and burning yourself out like a lot of people might do, especially, you know, caught up in things like ecology and all that, and they get very frustrated and angry and despairing. And it's all done with goodwill, with active, but they're burning themselves out, see?

And he gives that lovely example, doesn't he? Somebody came along with a machete. He doesn't use that word, but he came along with a sword and chopped you from limb to limb. If ever you were even to be angry, you're no disciple of mine. I once said that in another talk. Somebody said, well, the Buddha had a great sense of humor. But I think he meant it.

So this idea of bearing with people, patient forbearance, it's a perfection, you see. And it undermines all the other stuff as well, especially the whole thing about victimization, you know, being the victim and how people get caught up in that. You know, why me? It moves into a sort of self-pity, you see. And what happens is they're unable to forgive. So they're locked into a really dreadful. A dreadful state, dreadful state. They just can't get out of that because they have been hurt. Nobody's denying that and all that. But there's that self-pity. Why me? And the hatred.

And so long as there's self-pity, you can't forgive. There's a block. And it's only when you begin to put yourself in the shoes of the other person who's done the harm and recognize that they also are going to have a lot of suffering because of the harm they've done. And how do we know that? By investigating the harm that we've done and recognizing that actually, internally, I'm not looking at the amount of suffering in me for the harm I've done to somebody else. And the greater the harm, the more difficult it is to forgive oneself, you see. So that whole victim thing can be a real lock. And patient forbearance is part of that process of forgiveness.

There's, of course, energy, compassion. The Buddha is very tough on energy. I mean, the word comes up right there in the discourse on establishing right awareness, *tapo*, *ātāpī*, *ātāpī*, which comes from this word *tapo*, which comes up in the Maṅgala Sutta there. And it's the energy that you need to really, you know, complete a task. Whatever it is, to complete the task, to finish it, you know, whatever you undertake.

Often, you know, people, they come on a retreat, you see, they come on a retreat, it gets a bit tough. They made a resolution to stay the week, it gets a bit tough, and towards it they give up, you see. Now, what they're doing is that they're undermining their ability to perfect their commitments. So that any time it gets a bit difficult, there's always this little escape.

That doesn't mean to say... I mean, on retreats, I'm sure you've heard me say that to commit yourself to the course, save an extraordinary circumstance or emergency. So it's not as though it's an absolute thing, you know. You know, I like it, you know, if... If the place caught fire, you're not supposed to sit there and, I will not leave this place. So there's also a sort of common sense. But whenever we say we're going to do

something and we don't do it, we're actually harming ourselves.

So, for instance, you might say to a friend, yeah, I'll come and decorate. And then your phone will tell you you're not feeling so well today. And it's like you're undermining this ability to make resolutions, to make determinations. And if you think again of the Buddha's own practice, the moment of great determination, to sit under that tree, either to crack this problem or to die. And that's where he got to. It was almost, you might say, a point of despair, you know. He had this little insight. He had this insight coming from childhood to actually investigate suffering. But he could see no other way. And if this didn't work, well, that was it. So he was prepared to sit there until he died with it. We call that the great determination.

So that's this business of energy. The energy is needed, but resolution is the other perfection. But you need that energy. When you suffer from dullness and lethargy, you see, remember that is also an energy. So you don't look at it negatively. Don't think to yourself, well, you know, this is something dragging me down. It is dragging you down, but it's an actual force. It's a mental energy. It can also be physical. And if we just allow it to manifest, it also transforms, it also sublimates into its opposite, which is good energy. Sometimes it'll flip and become restlessness, but when it's actually moving towards its opposite, it's moving into this lovely flow of energy when our meditation is very easy for us.

Truthfulness here is something quite specific. It's really keeping your promise rather than not telling great big budgies. You know, I mean that's part of it, but it's actually when you say you do something that you actually do do it. So you can see that that melds into the whole thing of resolution and stuff.

And the other one is wisdom, of course. I've not put them in the same order here. Wisdom is a mental, call it that, a mental virtue. So it's really understanding things. And really it all begins there, doesn't it? If we've misunderstood something, then things go awry. So we always have to come back to this, you know, the Buddha's constant encouragement to reflect wisely, see, wise reflection, *yoniso manasikāra*.

So at the end of a sitting, that's why, you know, just to get in the habit of, even if you only pick up one thing from your sitting, to just think about it, let it come to mind. And at the end of a day, you see, just to look back for a moment, pick up one or two things, yeah. We have to be very careful not to always pick up the negative stuff. We're very good at that. We have to also pick up the positive stuff. Positive stuff that's happened to us today. What we've done today.

And that's another thing about joy. You've got to actually excite joy within us. You've got to remember times when you were joyful. and understand how that joy came about. And this sort of builds up a well of joy, you see. We tend to be a bit negative usually, don't we? We tend to remember all the horrible things, because they hurt. The pleasurable things that don't hurt, they're all right. But by doing that, we get a sort of lopsided view of our lives sometimes. It's all miserable and horrible and all that. We forget that we've just had a good meal.

So these are our *pāramitā*. The final one is equanimity. And it's arguable, definitely Nyānaponika Thera,

who wrote that very good book, you know, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. It still is really a classic book. But he also wrote other essays and in one he argues quite strongly that the perfection of equanimity is really the perfection because it balances everything. Although equanimity can have its own dark energy, its own dark side of indifference. It does have this ability to not to stop these things overriding, see?

So that, you know, things like love doesn't become attachment, see? So seeing where the attachment is. How do you know? How do you know when you're attached, you see? Well, there's many ways, aren't there? Especially when you're getting irritated with somebody because they're not doing what you want them to do. That's an obvious case of attachment, see? Or when they disappoint you, when you're disappointed in somebody, see? Expectation, stuff like that.

Compassion slips into pity, doesn't it? Pity for somebody. And if you think about how you feel when somebody pities you, then you know how horrible it is for somebody who's being pitied by you. So it stops that, you see. And again, it's this business of being open to what the other person is asking for, not getting into that do-gooder thing.

Joy slips into excitement. So you can, if you take any virtue, you'll see it has a little, it has a subtle energy, a subtle enemy, you see. So courage slips into foolhardiness. I can't think of any more. Mine's gone. But if you think of any virtue, it'll always have its little, slightly subtle negative side that it can slip into. I mean, we can talk about generosity. So it slips into over-generosity. It goes beyond what you're actually capable of doing, and you undermine yourself by doing that.

So that's a quick run-through, you might say, of these *pāramitā*, these *pāramitā*. So it does say here, these qualities were developed and brought to maturity by the Bodhisattva in his past existences, in this way practicing them, illustrating the many birth stories of Jātaka. However, it's only the verses that are regarded as canonical. That's of the stories around the Buddha. You know, where he's reborn as a hare and a... It's all Aesop's fables, really.

So we can end this just by me reading this lovely little paragraph which expresses what the Bodhisattva or the person who wants to develop these ten perfections. As the great being, see Mahāsattva, so that's synonymous really for the Bodhisattva, destined for Buddhahood are concerned with the welfare of living beings not tolerating the suffering of beings wishing long duration to the higher states of happiness of beings and being impartial and just to all beings therefore they give alms to all beings so that they may be happy without investigating whether or not they are worthy by avoiding to do them any harm observe morality and in order to bring morality to perfection they train themselves in renunciation in order to understand clearly what is beneficial and injurious to beings they purify their wisdom and for the sake of the welfare and happiness of others they constantly exert their energy though having become heroes through utmost energy they are nevertheless full of forbearance towards the manifold failings of beings.

Once they have promised to give or to do something, they do not break their promise. That's the

truthfulness. With unshakable resolution, they work for the welfare of beings. And with unshakable kindness, they are helpful to all. And by reason of their equanimity, they do not expect anything in return.

It's nice, isn't it? I remember once this causing a bit of a discussion as to whether you should give without investigating whether they are worthy or not. This is commentary, remember, so we can feel free to question that one.

So I hope my words have been of some assistance. And that you will soon perfect the perfections and enter into that wonderful place, *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

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