An Attempt to Understand the Teaching of Anattā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 49:56

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

Tonight I'm going to attempt the impossible and try to explain this whole doctrine of not-self. The Buddha is very clear that there are certain things where language cannot reach. When we're talking about something which is beyond phenomena, language simply won't do.

Consider, for instance, trying to describe the colour green to somebody who has been blind since birth. You talk about how it differs from red and grey and yellow, and then you give all sorts of imagery about green valleys and green trees and green leaves. In the end, the blind person has some idea that green is some sort of colour, but they won't be able to visualise it.

So we have to be very careful about conceptual ideas about not-self. Buddhism itself began to develop a very intricate metaphysical philosophy, begun by somebody who is recognized possibly as the greatest metaphysician in the world—Nagarjuna—who went on and on about emptiness, and then, because he was trying to get rid of the concept of emptiness, he talks about the emptiness of emptiness. That's exactly what language and concepts do: they fall into themselves. You're constantly trying to define what you mean.

With that in mind, we'll have a go at this not-self. Hopefully at the end of the talk, I'll give you an exercise whereby you can actually begin to experience it, some of which we've already discussed.

The next thing is to really understand what was meant by attā—an attā, not-self, attā. What was the attā? At the time of the Buddha there was considerable confusion about what this attā was. What they were taught is translated in the West as "not-self," which is unfortunate because the word we should use is "soul" or "spirit." That's what the Buddha is arguing about. He's arguing about something which people believed was eternal.

So how do you describe something which is eternal, doesn't die, is the unconditioned, is not born, not created? How do you describe something like that? Eventually, you can only describe it by what it isn't. The Buddha simply puts to the early disciples certain questions as to whether it is this or that.

Now, what would be the constituents of a soul, of an eternal soul? The first thing is it cannot change,

because if it changes, it's something different—so it's not eternal. It's as simple as that. If you say, for instance, "I am happy," and the next minute you're sad, then where has your happiness gone? You can't be the happiness and the sadness at the same time. So we're talking about being. We're not talking about something becoming and changing. A quality of the soul or spirit is this quality of being unchanging.

The second thing is it cannot suffer, because it's in control of itself. It is itself, and therefore it can decide, as it were, that it's going to be happy or sad. If it didn't have that control, then it can't be "me." Parents have a certain control over their children, but they know full well that eventually they have no control. The control is simply a contract between the child and the parent—it's something that's imagined between them. But ultimately, control is part and parcel of the definition of a soul or a self. If it's not in control of itself, then it means that it can be changed by circumstance.

So one thing the soul can do—this eternal soul—is make itself happy. It is in a state of happiness. Now we have to be careful how we define happiness. It's not an emotion, because emotions change. So we're talking about something which is a state beyond emotional states. We'll come to that in a bit.

The final thing is it has to have some sort of substantiality—it has to be real. Often you encounter words like "the real," "the ultimate," "the absolute" in all religions. So there has to be this quality of is-ness: it exists. This is defined as different from "becoming." If something is becoming, then it has stopped being something and becomes something else, so there can't be any change in that process. On the other hand, it has to be substantial.

Now the Buddha is saying, "Well, okay, so we have this definition," and he's just asking these questions. Remember, after he became fully liberated, he goes back to his companions who don't really want to talk to him because they think he's gone soft—that he's left the hard life. But as he approaches them, they see that something has changed about him. So, somewhat reluctantly I suppose, they offer him a seat. During the ensuing conversation he has with them, one of the little repetitions that he says is, "Have I ever spoken like this before? Have you ever heard me speak like this before?"

Now, the first discourse, as it's put, the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, is obviously a later creation, just laying the platform of his teaching. But it would have been in this conversational style. And in the second discourse, after they go off on an alms round and return to eat and rest, he gives them this second talk. This second talk is called the Anattalakkhana Sutta—the discourse on this characteristic of not-self.

In this discourse, we do get the sense of this conversational process, like the Socratic method you find in Plato. Not that I've read Plato, but that's what we mean by this Socratic method of questions and answers. So I'm going to use this discourse as a sort of basis.

By the way, these lovely little e-readers are actually wonderful—I've got a whole library in here. The discourse begins, as these discourses always do, with "Thus have I heard," because they were related after the Buddha's passing by his companion Ananda. So it's what Ananda heard: "On one occasion the Blessed

One was dwelling at Baranasi in the deer park at Isipatana."

This is where he went to find his former companions. If you take the mileage from Bodh Gaya, where he was enlightened, all the way to Varanasi on the Ganges, I remember it as being something like four hundred miles. So his decision to teach really meant that he was on the road. And he spent the rest of his life on the road, really.

"And there the Blessed One addressed the monks"—monks here means any listener, really. So they replied, "Venerable Sir." Now, form is non-self, not-self. The word form refers to our physicality. And the Buddha gives us a cross-section of the human being in time. If you were to stop time, freeze a human being at this moment, and try to describe what a psychophysical organism was, he put it in these five aggregates, these five heaps, because he wants to show where the problem lies.

The first heap is all this physicality. The second one is our feelings—all the feelings in the body, both those caused by the body itself and by the mind. The next one is all our perceptions, which includes both basic perceptions but grows into concepts. They grow into ways of looking at something. You might include in that our memory, but feeling also has memory too. Then there are volitional formations. These are our habits, and they are created by acts of will. And finally there are acts of cognition. All of this must be put on a screen for us to know. If it's not on a screen, we won't be able to see it. We don't see things when we fall asleep because the screen has sort of fallen. But there's still stuff coming in, and every so often you'll hear something tinkling and it'll wake up this act of cognition and you'll know it's time to get up.

So these are the five components as the Buddha saw it of the human being. Physical form is physicality, and all the rest is mentality: the feelings as we experience them in the body, all the perceptions that we have, which includes more detailed concepts in time, all the habits that we have—both good and bad—driven by and created by the will, and finally these acts of cognition.

I try not to use the word consciousness because it's being studied these days, and from a Buddhist point of view there's enormous confusion as to what consciousness is. Some philosophers and some scientists actually think that the content of consciousness is consciousness itself. Anyway, we don't want to get into that, so I shall leave that word aside.

Cognition is like a television screen. You've got all these—what is it that hits the TV? I've forgotten the word for it. You know, it's hitting the screen. What are those little subatomic particles that create the light? Electrons, isn't it? Anyway, the screen on the television manifests—it brings things into a form which you can see. Without that, the TV is useless. So that's the act of cognition. There's something in this brain-mind complex which creates a picture for us. Those of you who've seen how the eye works when it looks at a picture—it's darting all over the place, completely unknown to us. What we see is the full picture.

But the eye is constantly moving, picking up little bits and bobs. Yet the mind is able to take all of that and present us with something that appears still. It gives us an impression of wholeness.

So when it comes to this not-self, this is what the Buddha says. He says that if form—the body—were self, this form would not lead to affliction. And it would be possible to determine the body: "Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus." But because the body is not self, is not the soul, is not in charge, this form leads to affliction. This body leads to affliction. And it is not possible to determine our form.

We have minimal control over the body. I can wave my arm around here while I'm speaking, but I can't stop it falling ill. I can't stop it getting older. And I can't stop it dropping dead. So this limited control I have over my body is a way of saying that whatever soul is, it is not the body.

Then there is feeling. When we discuss feeling from this point of view, we see that we don't have much control over it. When you put your foot on the ground, it feels. You can't say to your foot, "Don't feel the footstep." It will simply do it. We don't have that control. The same applies to emotions. If you get angry over something, you can't stop your body feeling hot. That's the way it reacts. If you feel happy, it feels light. So again, it's to do with looking at feelings and knowing that this can't be a soul. It can't be eternal.

Then perceptions. Perceptions are changing even more quickly because every time we look at something that we know, it's ever so slightly changed. Every time you look at a tree, it's always refining your idea of a tree. Every time you see a cat, it comes onto the concept of a cat so that you can recognise, "This is a cat." But by looking at that cat, your concept of a cat will slightly change. It's always changing. So perceptions, which are manifest in our words and images, are constantly in the process of renewal or forgetting. You forget things that you knew. So again, when it comes to control, our control is minimal.

Then we have these volitional formations—habits. These are created by acts of will. So often we have a habit that we might not want. Say, a smoker who doesn't want to smoke anymore. That's a habit, so they have to work against it. If they weren't able to change the habit, then of course they would have no control whatsoever. But what we find is that habits have an inner strength in themselves. Trying to get rid of a habit takes time. And the kernel of it is always there.

So often you hear stories of people who have not smoked for years. And then they retire. And at a party, they think, "Oh well, I'll just take the one." And of course what they've done is kick-started this potential within them of enjoying a cigarette, of enjoying nicotine. And then they find it difficult to stop. So even though we've kicked a habit which we felt has dominated us for a while, the potential is always there, you see, as a little kernel, a little seed.

And then finally, these acts of cognition. Acts of cognition happen quite naturally. As soon as you place your eye on something, you see it. You can't not see it. As soon as a sound comes at your eardrum, you hear it. You can't not hear it.

You can't decide, "Well, I won't listen to that," because it's already happened.

So at this basic level of control, we find that if we define a soul—an eternal soul—as something which is in control of itself, then we discover that this psychophysical organism doesn't live up to it.

Then you get this question and answer exchange. Now the Buddha is going on to the quality of impermanence. He says, "What do you think? Is form—is the body—permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, venerable sir."

You're very good at these ones.

"Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?"

"Oh, suffering, sir."

"Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is myself'?"

So here we have three relationships. The first is something that I own. Now think about it—when you say "this is mine," what are we actually saying? When I hold up this e-reader, this Kindle, and say "this is mine"—and I'm very attached to it, by the way—what does that really mean? Somebody comes along, sees my Kindle, and decides they want it. So they take my Kindle. Now I go around saying, "Somebody stole my Kindle! Somebody's taken my Kindle!" But it's not mine, is it? It's the thief's. The thief's got it. It's his Kindle now.

So this "mine" business is just a legal fiction. It's just something we've made up in society concerning my-ness—"this is mine." What we come to understand is that when it comes to objects, you can only use them. As soon as you start possessing them, you end up suffering. There's always the potential for suffering.

Then there's "this I am." If you pose yourself this little sentence—"I am"—and finish it off, what do you get? "I am a nurse." "I am a teacher." "I am..." Is that permanent? This "I am" is always having to describe itself. It's always self-referential. If you say "I am happy," where does the "I" go when you're unhappy?

So this "I am" is always a definition. You always have to finish the sentence, and then you realise that this "I" is only a way of describing what is being done at any given moment. If you're teaching, yes—"I am teaching." But is there a teacher there? If the teacher is being created by the sense of "I," what's actually happening is simply the process of teaching.

And then finally, "my self" or "my soul." Remember, when we talk about self, we talk about soul—something eternal. So can we say that about the body? No. I hope you agree with me.

Then the Buddha goes on to the other aggregates. Feeling—is it permanent or impermanent? Perceptions—are they permanent or impermanent?

Our volitional formations, these habits that we have—are they permanent or impermanent? And these acts of cognition, are they permanent or impermanent?

The answer, of course, is they're all impermanent, venerable sir.

And is what is impermanent suffering or happiness? Well, it's unsatisfactory, isn't it? Now, why is it that these things are unsatisfactory? It's because we're searching always for that complete, utter happiness and contentment. It's within us to do that. As human beings, we find ourselves in a constant surge of trying to be happy, however you wish to define it. You might be happy with a lot of money, might be happy with a lot of friends—it doesn't matter how we define it, but we always want to be happy and contented.

But because as soon as we get something which we call happiness, and then we finally come to a point in our lives and say, "Oh, now I've got everything I wanted"—as soon as you've said that, it's gone. You want to stop the world. "Now I've got it." But the very grasping of that moment undermines its joy. "To kiss a joy as it flies is to live in eternity's sunrise," as Blake wrote. But we don't want to do that. We want to catch it.

So what is impermanence? Is suffering subject to change? Is what is impermanent and unsatisfactory and subject to change something we should regard as "this is mine"? Should I become attached to things when I know that there's potential for unsatisfactoriness there—sometimes great suffering?

This becomes very difficult when you start talking about relationships. How can you love without the attachment? "This I am"—see, a self-definition. As soon as you say that and it's undermined, then you're into some form of suffering. And "this is my self, this is my eternal soul"—well, that's difficult.

So then he tries to put all this together. Therefore, any kind of form—that's the body, remember—whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near. See, he's trying to cover all angles. All bodies, all physical natures should be seen as they really are with correct understanding: this is not mine, this is not me, this I am not, and this is not a soul or a self. And then of course he says the same of the other four heaps—the feelings, all the feelings that we have, all the perceptions, all the different habits that we collect, and our acts of cognition.

Then he says, when we see this, when we really grasp this, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with the body. Disenchanted. So what does enchantment mean, you see? It's being caught up in a dream, caught up in a fantasy. Disenchantment is simply breaking that fantasy, breaking the dream. Disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with habits and volitional formations, disenchanted with acts of cognition. And becoming disenchanted, one becomes dispassionate.

Now that sounds rather empty, doesn't it? What happens if you have no passion, no emotions? But remember, these are the emotions driven by wrong understanding. This is not the Buddha heart. The Buddha heart is full of love, compassion, sympathetic joy, peacefulness, and all the things that we cherish. What he's talking about here are all those mental states driven by this sense of self.

This self-view even corrupts things like love, because love slips into its near enemy of attachment. It corrupts compassion because compassion slips into its near enemy, its subtle enemy of grief. It corrupts joy into excitement, overexcitement. And equanimity slips into indifference. It's all done because we're

not actually seeing things, in his terms, as they really are.

It's through this undermining of wrong relationship that finally somebody comes to be liberated. And then that person understands: destroyed is birth, the spiritual life has been lived, what had to be done has been done. There's a lovely sense of completion there. There is no more coming back into any state of becoming.

When the Buddha became fully liberated, he did not disappear. Nor did he become some amorphous blob by the side of the road with a sign saying "Liberated. Do not disturb." From other people's point of view, his personality was the same. He looked the same. Visually, from the outside, nothing had happened. But internally, something had changed. And what had changed was that sense of "me." So what the Buddha is talking about is the rebirthing of "me"—the rebirthing of a wrong sense of self. That's what disappears.

"Now when the Blessed One had spoken, elated, those monks delighted in the Buddha's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the monks of the group of five"—these were his five early companions—"were liberated from the taints through non-clinging." They were all liberated right then and there. Anybody here? No? Do ask around.

So we have here a very clear exposition. And none of it, you see, is philosophy. None of it is mere philosophy. You have to think about it. You have to experience it for yourself.

Now, the Buddha gives this description of not-self as a cross-section in time. If you were to take a human being in the present moment, you would end up with these five categories. But he also examines a human being as a process—what we call dependent origination. There isn't time to go into that deeply, but what he points out in this process is that the sense of "I" comes late. First, there is contact. Then, when there's contact with something, there arises a definition of it in terms of what the texts call its "hedonic value"—meaning whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. We decide whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, or some shade of that. Once that's decided, we form a relationship to it. We either want it or we don't want it. And it's only then that the sense of "I" comes.

So in our language, we say, "I will get this nice ice cream which I saw in the shop." Psychologically, what's happening is the other way around: ice cream in the shop, "like," "get," and then finally "I." The sense of "I" comes quite late in that process of recognising something and deciding to do something. So the "I" is not always there. But because the mind is moving at such terrific speed, we get this sense of a constant "me" throughout the entire process.

Neurobiologists have done tests showing that decisions are made before the person consciously knows them, and then the person, as it were, agrees to it—but actually believes they made that decision. In Buddhist terms, that's called the unaware life. Because one of the things we're doing on retreat is becoming aware of our intentions. When you're aware of your intentions, you re-empower yourself, you take control of your life, because then you actually decide. But when we're living at an automated level,

we're just behaving habitually. And then we do this little trick where we think we've actually made the decision.

So you walk down the supermarket aisle with all these hundreds of biscuits, thinking you're going to have a real choice. But you end up buying the chocolate biscuits. And then you say to yourself, "Well, I decided to buy these chocolate biscuits." Phooey. What rubbish. It's only when you make the process conscious that you can then make an informed decision. That's dependent origination.

Now, how do we approach this? Let's take a more modern angle, in the sense of what happens to us from the point of being in the womb onwards. Somewhere in the womb, it seems as though we slowly become aware of what's around us.

We don't know it's around us. We feel it's in us. We feel it *is* us. But we can hear our mother's voice. We can sense her moods and so on. This is what they say.

Then we're born, and it would seem that for the first three or four months, we just live in this bath of stimulus, which has no depth to it. It's like a kaleidoscope. All we know is when it hurts and when it doesn't hurt. When it hurts, we scream. When it doesn't hurt, we feel okay.

Somewhere within that mass, it seems, after about three or four months, the first object looms out of it. And for the most part, of course, it's our mothers. So there's some separation going on. It would seem that when a baby is lunging out in the pram for its baubles and bangles, it's actually creating a three-dimensional world. It doesn't exist until they've actually created it.

Now, you can see that what the baby's doing is pushing the outside world outward from its sense of self. It does this because it doesn't have a conceptual idea of itself—it just experiences everything as itself. As it pushes everything out, somewhere along the line, probably at the point where it becomes self-aware—somewhere around about the age of one and a half, perhaps a little earlier—finally this little baby has pushed the world out and is becoming quite clear that the world is out there and "I" am in it. This is me. And usually somewhere along the line, perhaps before three, the child knows they're a boy or a girl. They're quite clear about who and what they are and what they are not. "This is not me." They've got lots of "mine," but it's not me.

Now, in our meditation, that's all we're doing. We're taking that process inward to push away from this sense of self what we've always presumed to be me. As soon as a pain comes in the body, you see, normally speaking, a person might say, "Oh, I've got pain," and then take an aspirin or shake their leg about. But we don't do that. We sit with it. We observe it. And these noting words are very good at making it quite distinct. So I'm saying, "pain, pain." I can make it more obvious to myself by saying, "There's pain, there's pleasure, there's a sense of comfort." By doing that, I'm relocating my sense of self into that which is observing, which is feeling.

Now that's the easy one. It gets a little harder when it comes to emotions, because we identify with

emotions in a more inward way. So I'm sitting here and somebody coughs just about when I was going to be fully liberated, and a great irritation arises. But I'm quick enough to sit there and observe this feeling of irritation. What have I done? I've pushed it away from my sense of me. I'm saying, "irritation, there, there." I hear a bird and the sound of the bird's voice raises joy in me. And I say, "joy, there's joy, there's joy." In so doing, I'm pushing away this sense of me within the joy, making joy an object. And this sense of me now relocates to that which is feeling and knowing.

When it comes to images in the mind—a big image, sometimes people get colours or strong images in the mind—you're there, you can see it.

You're looking at it. You can say "imagining, imagining." And in so doing, again, you've pushed out into an objective world—an inner objective world—what before you thought was "me." And again, the sense of identity falls back into the observer, the feeler, the knower.

To do that with thought, you've really got to be quite awake. But you can actually, with good concentration, with good attention, see a thought arising and passing away, like a neon light.

So then you're left now, within yourself, with a strong sense of "I am the observer, the feeler, the one who knows inside." And you've pushed everything else out, you see. So everything you've done unwittingly—you've actually said, "This is not me, this is not a soul, this is not self. It's not permanent," and so on and so forth. But the feeling of being the observer has a certain permanency about it. The feeling of being the observer has a certain steadiness about it.

So now, when you get to that point and you really have a clear feel of being the observer, when you come out of that state into reflection, ask yourself: what were the inner constituents of the observer?

When there's pain in the knee—I said this to the small group this morning—we might go into the pain and find that actually the noting word changes. It becomes "tight," "stinging," "a lot of heat," but we don't say "pain." When we come away from that position of observation deep within the pain and we return to the surface of that feeling, suddenly the word "pain" arises, and we know then that the word "pain" is a mental construct. It's not that we want to lose it. We want to know when there's pain in the body so we can go to the doctor. But we're not fooled by it. Pain doesn't exist as such. What exists are those feelings, those sensations.

When we come out of that sense of the observer, when it's very clear to us, we can stop and reflect on what were the inner qualities of the observer. That's the first little exercise you might do.

The second one is more meditative. When you get that sense of the observer—difficult to get it in a weekend, you understand—but when you get that sense of the observer, turn toward it. The feel of it. The sense of presence. That sense of presence is often thought by people to be their soul—a sense of presence, you see. But it's also an object. It can't be you. The feeling of self-awareness—you're aware of the feeling or the idea of self-awareness. So therefore, that can't be you either. It's very mysterious.

So what we do then is put the attention just on the feel, the sense of presence. And then at some point there may be some realisation, some understanding, that that which is looking is what we've been looking for. But we'll never be able to see it. That's the problem.

So in the Mahayana they talk about the eye. The eye can never see itself. The nose can't smell itself. The tongue cannot taste itself. If the basic taste of a tongue were curry, it would mess up the ice cream. It's the fact that it's empty, that it doesn't have any taste, that allows us to taste. It's the fact that the eye cannot see itself that allows it to see.

So we can only be—we can only experience—that within us which is not part of this phenomenal world.

Now we have the Buddha trying to explain this, a little more straightforwardly than I'm doing.

The teaching, the truth—connected to Nibbana. And to those who are receptive, those who have ears, let them hear.

"There is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned."

So there is. Now, the word he uses here is significant. There are two words for "is" in the Pali language. One is *hoti*, used as a connective—so if I say "this is a shrine," it's simply a connecting word. But *atthi*, the word he uses here, means "exists." There exists the not-born. And notice how he uses an adjective rather than a noun, so he doesn't concretize it. The unborn. An unbecome—something which isn't in a process of becoming, of changing. Unmade, uncreated. It was never created. It's not born, it's not created. And unconditioned—beyond conditioning. Conditioning only happens when there are two things present. Because I'm in this room, in this way, in this retreat, I'm being conditioned to sit in this manner. But this is something beyond all conditioning.

"If there were no unborn, no unbecome, no unmade or unconditioned, no escape could be discerned from what is born, from what does become, what is created and what is conditioned. But because there is—there exists—that which is not born, doesn't die, doesn't become, is not created and not conditioned, there is an escape to be discerned from what is born, become, made and conditioned."

That's pretty clear.

But there's another passage where he's even clearer, because he's asked by somebody: where is it that the four great elements come to an end completely? Now, the four great elements are earth, fire, water, and air. They're symbolic for pressure—gravity. Fire represents heat, energy. Water is that which congeals, elasticity, holds things together. And air represents movement. This is the way the mind experiences matter—not to be confused with some grand theory of physics. The Buddha's descriptions are always about the mind and the way it experiences the world.

So this questioner asks, where does the world come to an end? That's what he's really asking—where does the physical world cease? And the Buddha says the question is not put rightly. What you should be asking

is: where does the world not find a footing?

And he comes out with a phrase which occurs only twice in all the scriptures: "There is a consciousness." Now again, we must be careful with this word consciousness. I would prefer "there is a knowing" or "there is an awareness." There's an awareness which is without boundary. Boundary is only created by phenomena. It's only because we have four walls here that this room has a boundary. So it's without boundary—there's no phenomena.

There's nothing there in that sense. Not coloured by any of the senses. So the senses in Buddhism are the five that we know, but also the mind as a sensing base, which includes our images and thoughts. So nothing is there that we would normally describe a human being by. And in all directions, full of light. And awakenedness. Just this is the end of suffering.

So now, our job is to find what that is. When we say find what that is, it means direct experience for ourselves. And the process is one of negation. Not me, not mine.

In your meditation sometimes you might sit down and say to yourself, "Well, in this particular practice—this quarter of an hour, an hour, whatever you want to take—I'm just going to point to things as they come up and say, 'There.'" So there's pain—there. There's comfort—there. There's joy—there. There's a thought—there, there, there, all the time. And when you get to that sense of self—there's a sense of self—there, there. Constantly pulling yourself out of this enmeshment, this enchantment with the psychophysical organism. And there is no doubt that within good time, insights will arise which will liberate us from our delusions.

So what is the delusion that the Buddha talks about? What is this essential delusion? It's a delusion about who we are. And the deeper process of our meditation, of our practice, is to find out what it is that we really are. To put it in a very positive way.

We've talked about these five khandhas. The body. Feelings. Khandhas here means aggregates, heaps—they're all different. The body. Sensations, feelings. Feelings in the body. Our perceptions and conceptions. All our habits that are made by will and therefore can be unmade—and this is where the suffering is. To distinguish between suffering and pain: pain in the knee is just pain. What we make of it is the suffering—our aversion and fear of it. And finally, acts of cognition. And each time he's asking: always, is this permanent? Can this be defined as a soul, an eternal soul?

And then he talks about impermanence. Because things are impermanent, they have an inbuilt suffering because they can't satisfy. And that's the meaning of dukkha. Dukkha is a core word in the Buddha's language. We translate it as unsatisfactoriness, as suffering, a sense of lack, a sense of incompleteness. It's always there, even though we might have ecstatic moments—it always passes. So there's always a sense of... And you know you can't get that again. It's a disaster, isn't it, when you have a great party and you say, "Let's have another one." But you just can't do that.

And then we talked about this more modern way of looking at how our sense of self retreats out of the world into a sense of me, the person. And how the meditation is just taking that inward. And eventually of course what we realise is that the outer world and the inner world are all being manufactured by the mind. We live in this bubble of consciousness which we are actually manufacturing moment after moment. So in a sense, what we make of it is our own problem.

And then finally, statements which point to something in us which doesn't belong to this realm of phenomena, this realm of the sense world. And a couple of exercises which might take us there—that being able to label things, being able to point to things and say, "There, there it is." So you're always creating a distinction between the object and the one that knows. The one who knows.

And that other final thing: when we become very clear about the sense of the observer, as distinct from everything that's happening, the reflection afterwards—what's it made of? What was inside this observer?

Okay? I expect an answer by noon tomorrow. I'll give you marks.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you, by your clarity and devotion to the practice, be liberated from all delusion and suffering—sooner rather than later.

You're supposed to say "sādhu." If you don't say that, I'll go away thinking it's been terrible.

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